

AFGHANISTAN



THE VALLEY OF BAMİYAN

AFGHANISTAN

A Study of Political Developments in Central Asia

by

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To

E. F-T.

WHO SHARES WITH ME
SO MANY MEMORIES OF THE PASSES
AND THE VALLEYS, THE RIDGES AND THE RIVERS
OF THE HINDU KUSH

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PREFACE

IN October 1910 I arrived for the first time in Peshawar, a second lieutenant on the unattached list for the Indian Army—the least of all created things. Thirty-one years later, in October 1941, I left Peshawar for the last time on vacating my appointment as British Minister in Afghanistan. Most of the intervening years were spent on or beyond the North-West Frontier of India, or in the Government of India, in the department dealing with foreign and frontier affairs.

Since leaving India in the spring of 1942 I have devoted such spare time as has been available from war and other work to researches into the history of this part of Asia. These researches into the background of a country's history whose foreground I already knew so well, crystallized in my mind certain points of view long held in rather nebulous fashion. They also brought home forcibly the fact, which I had already reason to suspect, that the history of the country lying between the Indus and the Oxus Rivers is scattered through many books, and is often told by writers possessing but imperfect acquaintance with their subject. It seemed that it was time for somebody, who knew the country and the people of the Hindu Kush, to tell their story as a consecutive narrative, and to try to give cohesion and sequence to what had hitherto appeared as an unrelated series of historical events. Hence this book.

It lays no claim to originality save in the fact that my own experiences (so far as I have been allowed to tell them) are original. Nor has it been possible to engage in much original research in studying a subject which has been dealt with so many times before. All I have tried to do is to tell the story, and in telling it to try to discover not so much what people did as why they did it.

Such a book could not have been produced, particularly at a distance from the main sources of information, without the help of many institutions and people. Parts of it were written in the United States, and I am much indebted to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., for their courtesy and help in my researches. At home the National Library of Scotland, to which I was

introduced by the kindness of my old friend, Sheriff R. H. Maconachie, and the Signet Library in Edinburgh put themselves at my disposal, and in Ross-shire, Mr. Macdonald, the County Librarian, was indefatigable in his efforts to meet my requirements from the Central Library at Dunfermline. The British and Natural History Museums in London also contributed to my studies.

I must make cordial acknowledgements to Messrs. John Wiley and Sons of New York for permission to quote in Part III, Chapter II, from the late Professor Ellsworth Huntington's work *The Mainsprings of Civilisation*; to the Editor of *Eastern World* for permission to reproduce in Part II, Chapter I, extracts from an article of mine on the Ghilzais which appeared in their issue of April 1948; to The Council of the Royal Central Asian Society for permission to borrow in Part II, Chapter XII (1), from an article on the building of the North Road which I wrote for the Society's Journal of April 1942; and to Mr. Harold Nicolson for permission to insert a quotation from his book *The Congress of Vienna* in Part III, Chapter III.

To Dr. W. W. Tarn I am much indebted for the help he has given me in ensuring the accuracy of the portions dealing with the Greek conquest and colonization of Central Asia and India. Professor Arnold Toynbee was good enough to read through Part III and to discuss with me the interesting and difficult questions posed therein. Captain Lionel Smith has read through the whole manuscript and offered many valuable comments and suggestions. Colonel A. S. Lancaster, formerly Military Attaché in Kabul, has furnished me with much useful information, and has permitted me to insert one of his photographs.

Lastly I come to three people who are intimately connected in my mind with much that appears in this book. To Sir Aubrey Metcalfe, under whom and with whom I worked when he was Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, I owe most sincere thanks for much help, particularly in the wearisome but vital task of correcting proofs. Sir Richard Maconachie was my chief in Kabul for several years, and to him I owe not only the encouragement which persuaded me to rewrite almost the whole manuscript of Parts I and II of this book, but also the stimulus during much of my service of working with one of the clearest and most acute minds that ever tackled the problems of Asia.

And finally there is His Royal Highness Sardar Muhammad Hashim Khan, uncle of King Zahir Shah and Prime Minister of Afghanistan during my time there as Counsellor, Chargé d'Affaires, and British Minister. I was fortunate indeed in having the opportunity to work in close association with a Prince who was not only a statesman of broad and penetrating outlook, but was also a great gentleman. I owe to him much of my knowledge of his country and his people, and through my association with him I learnt to understand something of the qualities of the great Durrani chiefs among whom he and his brothers were such outstanding figures. His Royal Highness may not like all that I have written in this book. But a writer of history must tell the truth as he sees it without fear or favour, and though there are no doubt things in this story which could have been better expressed, there is nothing in it save goodwill for the Afghan people and admiration for the men who in the last twenty years have guided the destinies of Afghanistan and safeguarded the approaches to India.

KESSOCK

ROSS-SHIRE

March 1949

Part I

THE COUNTRY OF THE HINDU
KUSH

Chapter I

DESCRIPTIVE

A TRAVELLER wending his way up the long rough road which lies between the Khyber Pass and the high plateau of central Afghanistan will at intervals catch glimpses on his right of a far-off ridge of snow-clad mountains. As the road turns and twists up the steep gradients so will this ridge appear and disappear behind the tangled mass of brown bare foothills rising tier upon tier towards the main range. Only when the traveller finally emerges on to the plateau and approaches Kabul city will he see sixty or seventy miles to the north the full panorama of the great ridge of the Hindu Kush standing out clear against the evening sky.

Little is now remembered of the story of these mountains though they have been seen and crossed at intervals since the dawn of history by famous men of many nations. Alexander knew them, and founded a city under their shadow; more than one Chinese pilgrim, seeking the birthplace of the Buddha, battled his way across their windswept ridges and through their long deep valleys. Marco Polo gives them brief mention as he passed them far off on his journey to the Court of Kublai Khan. Chenghiz and Timur and Babur crossed and recrossed them but have left scant record of their journeys. In more recent times they have retreated into obscurity; unmapped, unvisited and hardly known save to some chance traveller or scientist, in the modern world the name 'Hindu Kush' conjures up little more than a vague, shadowy outline of some far-off place in Asia. And yet this mountain ridge, the 'Great Divide' between Central and Southern Asia has in the past played a most vital role in history and may do so again.

The earliest reference to the range of mountains now known as the Hindu Kush is to be found in the *Meteorologica* of Aristotle (c. 330 B.C.). He there refers to the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas, the greatest mountain of the East, under the name Parnasos, which appears to have represented the native Indian name for the Hindu Kush. After Alexander's invasion of India

the name Parnasos was altered by the Greeks into Paropamisus, and correctly applied by them to the range of the Hindu Kush only, while the satrapy immediately south of the mountain and extending as far east as the Kunar River was called the Paropamisadae. It is curious to note that the name Paropamisus still remains, but is now confined to the low mountain range in the north-west separating Herat from the Russian frontier. After the time of Alexander later and less exact writers referred to the Hindu Kush as the Caucasus, or Indian Caucasus, a name which they continued to use for centuries. The origin for this, as given by the geographer Eratosthenes, who has, however, no great faith in the story, is that the Greek army, wishing to please Alexander, transferred the name 'Caucasus at the end of the earth' where Prometheus was chained to his rock and from which he was ultimately delivered by Heracles, to the farthest mountain range reached by them on their great adventure, to show that Alexander had surpassed the deeds of the god Heracles.

Whatever may have been the reasons both names were in the course of centuries supplanted by Hindu Kush, of which we first find mention in the story of the travels of Ibn Batuta who crossed the range c. A.D. 1334 on his journey to India. According to this writer the name Hindu Kush or Hindu-Killer derives from the fact that 'so many of the slaves, male and female, brought from India die on the passage of this mountain owing to the severe cold and quantity of snow'.¹ This derivation though doubtful is still popular, and I have never been able to find a more plausible explanation.

Although the name, Hindu Kush, is generally used, and will be so used in this book, to refer to the entire main range of mountains which traverses the country now called Afghanistan for 600 miles from east to west, strictly speaking it denotes only the eastern and central portions. The Hindu Kush properly called takes off in a south-westerly direction from the Sarikol and Muztagh ranges at a point in the glacial regions of the Pamirs a few miles west of the Killik Pass (75° east longitude ; latitude 37° 45'). From here it forms the watershed between the Oxus and Indus basins, and in a series of lofty glacier-strewn peaks and ridges traces the boundary between modern Afghanistan and the state of Chitral as far south-west as the Mandal Pass (long.

¹ H. A. R. Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Batuta*, iii, 84.

71° 12' ; lat. 36° 15'). Here, at the head of the Bashgul River the Hindu Kush leaves the Indo-Afghan frontier and crosses Afghanistan in a general westerly direction, gradually diminishing in altitude till, opposite Kabul, the main ridge is from 15,000 to 20,000 feet high. One hundred miles or so north-west of Kabul the Koh-i-Baba range, overlapping the western extremity of the Hindu Kush with which it is connected by the Shibar Pass, prolongs the watershed to the west past Bamiyan.

The main range continues westward from the Koh-i-Baba under different names and at an ever-diminishing height until north-east of Herat it becomes the Paropamisus Mountains which run out in a series of low ridges to the valley of the Hari Rud.

It is not easy to describe the Hindu Kush or to give any just idea of its bewildering conformation, as it spreads across Afghanistan and dominates the entire country in a series of subsidiary ranges breaking off from the main ridge to north and south. At its eastern end round the Kunar Valley and in Nuristan the deep ravines and precipitous slopes are clad with magnificent forests of deodar, pine, and larch. Further west the slopes and ridges are bare and brown, sparsely covered in places with a coarse grass which affords seasonal grazings for the nomad flocks of sheep as they move upwards in the summer from the sun-dried plains below. In the narrow valleys where the swift-running streams, snow-fed from the peaks above, make irrigation possible, the hardy poverty-stricken farmers of Nuristan and Hazarajat cultivate narrow strips of barley and of rice, while groves of poplars provide timber for their rough houses and welcome shade from the strong sun of summer. Here and there in the high valleys are to be found stretches of grassland where the beautiful green turf, reminiscent of the high 'margs' of Kashmir, affords a welcome contrast to the bare rocky heights above. But the general impression of the great range is of a wild, desolate, little-known country, a country of great peaks and deep valleys, of precipitous gorges and rushing grey-green rivers ; a barren beautiful country of intense sunlight, clear sparkling air and wonderful colouring as the shadows lengthen and the peaks and rocks above turn gold and pink and mauve in the light of the setting sun.

The present Kingdom of Afghanistan through which this massive range of mountains runs has an area of some 250,000

square miles, or about twice the area of the British Isles. In the extreme north-east the long narrow arm of the Wakhan Valley at its furthest point touches the Chinese border. The demarcation of this wild mountainous region was carried out in 1895 by the Anglo-Russian Pamir Boundary Commission who, having placed boundary pillars as far as it was possible to go, noted in their report:

From the 6th mile a rugged and inaccessible spur of the Sarikol range carries the boundary into regions of perpetual ice and snow to its junction with the main range. Here, amidst a solitary wilderness 20,000 feet above sea level, absolutely inaccessible to man and within the ken of no living creatures except the Pamir eagles, the three great Empires actually meet. No more fitting trijunction could possibly be found.¹

From this point for a distance of some 1,200 miles the Indo-Afghan boundary, known as the Durand Line, runs south-west till it reaches the Persian frontier at a rocky eminence, the Koh-i-Malik Siah, in the inhospitable desert regions beyond the Helmand River. Here the boundary turns at right angles and after crossing the Hamun of Sistan proceeds some 400 miles north to the Russian frontier at Zulfiqar. It then turns due east, skirting the edge of the Kara Kum sands and the Turkman country till it crosses the Murghab River, and thence north-east by Panjdeh and the Kara Bel plateau for 300 miles to join the Oxus at Kham-i-Ab. From this point eastwards the Oxus River forms the Russo-Afghan frontier.

Enclosed within these boundaries is the country of the Hindu Kush, forming the northern and southern glacis of this tremendous range. On the north it is protected by the Oxus River and on the east by the lofty ridges of the Pamirs. The south-eastern and southern frontiers are guarded by the line of the Indian frontier hills while on the west and north-west the sands of the Persian desert and the Kara Kum make access difficult.

Inside these boundaries we may divide the country roughly into four main sections, corresponding to the four principal river systems. In the north-east the Oxus rushing down from Lake Victoria and the high valley of Wakhan turns north to skirt the barren elevated plateau of Badakhshan, and then west past the

¹ Report of the Proceedings of the Pamir Boundary Commission, 1897.

broad stretches of Kataghan. Enclosed between the mountains and the river are long valleys opening on to wide stretches of fertile land which requires only water to make it rich and profitable.

Cotton is grown here now and sugar beet, while to the west by Andkhui are the great flocks of Karakul, the small black sheep from which comes the famous Afghan lambskin. The principal town is now Mazar-i-Sharif, but the area contains the site of the ancient city of Bactra or Balkh, the Mother of Cities, once famous as a great trading centre, and entrepôt for the caravans passing west from China along the silk route.

Little is left of Balkh to-day save mounds of sand and rubble covering a vast area. But it was a very great and prosperous city once, founded perhaps by the early Iranian settlers, and peopled by them until the repeated waves of nomad invasion drove them into the mountains of Badakhshan or westwards towards the Persian border. The present inhabitants are Turki-speaking people, mainly Uzbegs,¹ who have filtered down across the river and spread over the open lands of ancient Bactria to till the soil and tend their flocks.

A road runs now through the plain from Mazar-i-Sharif by Balkh and so westward across the Murghab River and over the low Paropamisus hills into the valley of the Hari Rud. Here where the main ridges of the Hindu Kush run out and stop lies a very fertile valley facing westwards to the Persian border, and in it on the north bank of the Hari Rud stands Herat. The history of Herat goes back into the dim records of pre-Achaemenian times when it was known as Heroiva. It stands as a flanking bastion of the Hindu Kush on the main highway to India, and above it to the east among the mountains was the ancient principality of Ghor, which in the twelfth century furnished a brief dynasty for the throne of Delhi.

The situation of Herat gives the keynote to its history. It was always changing hands, its fortunes rising and falling with the ebb and flow of the empires which surrounded it. In the thirteenth century it was sacked and utterly laid waste by the armies of Chenghiz Khan, and yet 200 years later we find it one of the foremost cities in Asia and a centre of culture and of art. It would appear to owe its resiliency to its situation and to the

¹ Uzbegs : see Pt. II, Ch. I.

fertility of the surrounding country, while its very site marks out the city as a focus of importance and of interest in the past and future history of Asia. In modern times it has been the home of the Abdali or Durrani Afghans ¹ and the capital of the province to which it gives its name. It is only some fifty miles from the Russian frontier at Kushk on a road which presents no obstacles to the invader.

Southwards from Herat the route runs by Sabzawar and Farah to the third of our divisions, the valley of the Helmand and the city of Qandahar. This route, the main road to western India, skirts the low foothills of the Hindu Kush and crosses the Helmand River some twenty miles from Qandahar. To the north-east the valleys are fertile and dense with orchards and vineyards and well-tilled fields, while to the south-west the country flattens and runs out among jagged isolated hills into the Registan, the great desert stretching away to the Persian border, unbroken save by the Helmand River.

Qandahar lies between the desert and the sown on the edge of the Registan, a city which has changed its actual site many times but has always been here or hereabouts, at a meeting place for many valleys and as a centre of trade with India.

The main road to India goes on from here sixty miles to the frontier, but we will take the road which runs north-east by Ghazni, now only a rather squalid offshoot of the famous city which in the eleventh century A.D. shone resplendent as the capital of the great Mahmud, iconoclast and scourge of the Hindus. Ghazni stands high and in winter the snowdrifts lie deep on the pass above, which leads by Logar into the valley of the Kabul River and the fourth main division of the country. For here we reach the watershed of the Indus, and whereas the Helmand, flowing south-west, loses itself in the great swamp of the Hamun on the Persian border, over the watershed all the rivers of eastern Afghanistan converge to flow across the Indian frontier through the hills north of the Khyber Pass to join the Indus at Attock.

Here in the Kabul River valley we are in a country rich in historical associations and in archaeological remains, a remote beautiful country, fertile and well cultivated wherever water can reach it, stony and barren on the heights above. Kabul the

¹ Afghans : Pt. II, Ch. I.

capital stands high (6,000 feet) and well sheltered in a gorge of the river, surrounded by open country, guarding the routes which converge on the plateau from the passes of the Hindu Kush to the north.

Kabul owes its pre-eminence to its strategical position. In the days of the early empires the capital was Alexandria-Kapisa, the city founded by Alexander on the banks of the Ghorband River some forty miles to the north. But Kapisa vanished and Kabul took its place as the principal city of this area, and grew until it became the capital of all Afghanistan. It is a picturesque city of no architectural pretensions, a densely packed mass of flat-roofed houses cut by covered bazars and dominated by the spur on which stands the Bala Hisar, the old citadel of many historical and sinister memories. North of the river the city spreads out into the villas and gardens of the Afghan aristocracy, clustering round the low crenellated walls of the royal palace.

From Kabul roads radiate to the four points of the compass, of which the most important is the north road, running up from India through the Khyber Pass to Kabul, and then on through the gorges of the Hindu Kush to the plains of Turkestan and the Oxus. This road from the Indus to the Oxus Valley owes its existence to the genius and perseverance of one man, King Nadir Shah, who saw it completed a few months before his tragic death in 1933.¹ Prior to that date the only routes connecting the northern and southern sides of the Hindu Kush were either the long journey by Herat and across the low hills of the Paropamisus, or the more hazardous passage across the passes.

But though difficult the main routes across the passes of the Hindu Kush are open for six months in the year. On the southern side the sheltered valleys run deep into the mountains and the ascent to the summit of the passes is short and steep. On the northern side of the watershed the slope is generally more gradual, but on neither side is it impracticable to laden animals save in the winter months. The line of perpetual snow is to be found generally at altitudes over 13,000 feet, but two of the principal passes, the Khawak (11,640 feet) and the Ak Robat (12,560 feet), are below this level, while the remainder can in a normal season be negotiated from May to October.

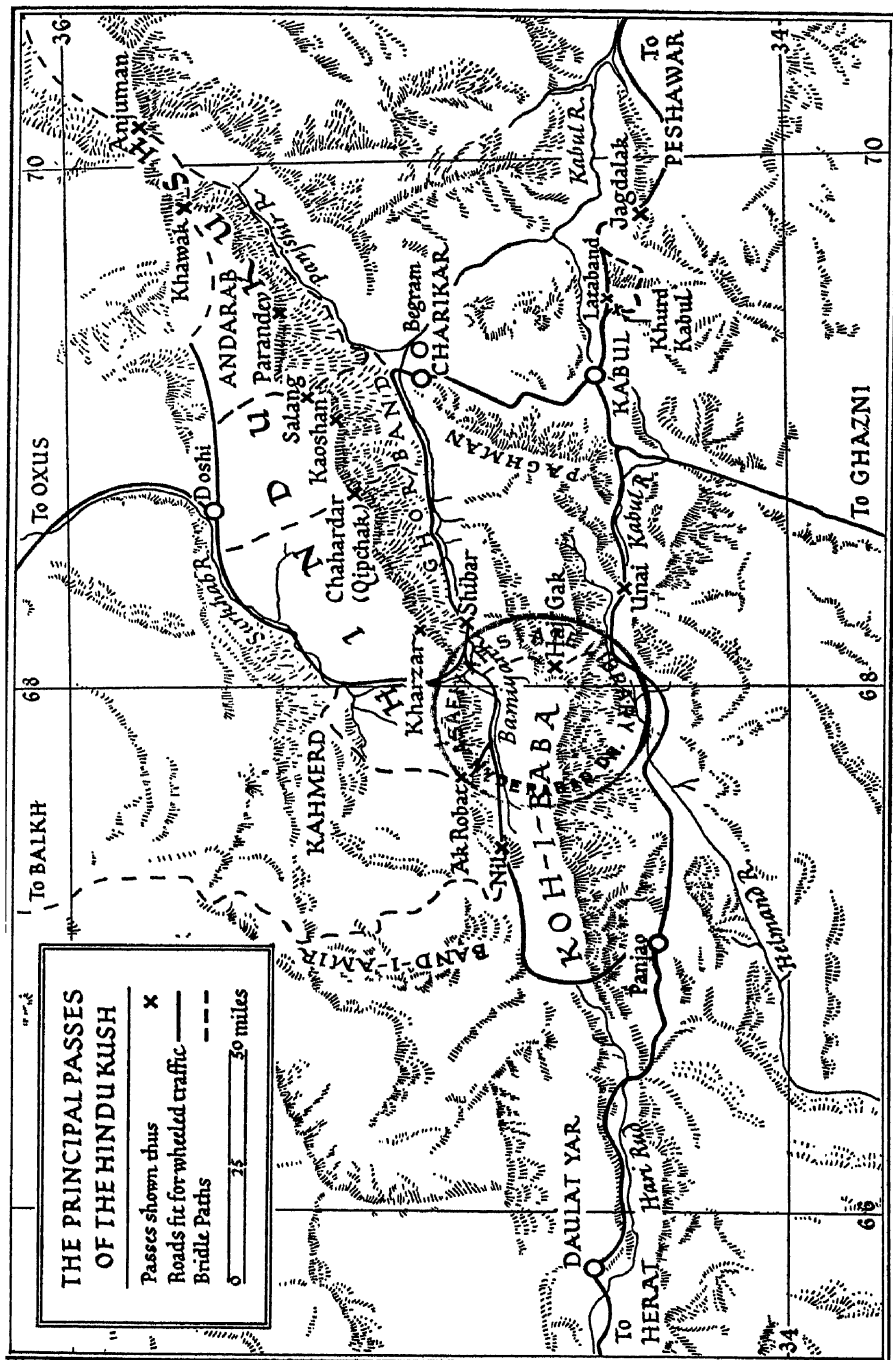
It seems reasonable to suppose therefore that from earliest

¹ See Pt. II, Ch. XII (1) for a description of this road.

times caravans from the great entrepôt of Balkh, branching off from the main trade route from east to west, carried the merchandise of China across the passes of the Hindu Kush to India, rather than by the more circuitous route through Herat. The earliest routes southwards from Balkh probably mounted the Balkh River and crossed the main ridge of the Hindu Kush by the Band-i-Amir and Nil Passes, or passing by Haibak and the Kahmerd Valley crossed the Ak Robot Pass. Both routes converged on the Bamiyan Valley where in Buddhist times the city of Ghulghula gave rest and refreshment to weary travellers. From Bamiyan there are two routes on to the Kabul plateau. The first which crosses the Shibar Pass and descends the Ghorband Valley seems to have been the principal route so long as Kapisa retained its pre-eminence as the principal city of the Paropamisadae. The Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-Tsang followed it in the seventh century A.D. and describes with feeling the pelting hail and snowstorms, the winding crooked passes and the mud stretching for miles. It is probable also that Chenghiz Khan followed this route in A.D. 1220.

At a later date when Kapisa had disappeared and Kabul was taking its place as the principal city immediately south of the passes it seems that the route from Bamiyan turned south, crossing the Koh-i-Baba range by the Haji Gak Pass, and after negotiating the upper waters of the Helmand and the Unai Pass beyond descended the beautiful valley of the Kabul River on to the central plateau, thus following a more direct route to Kabul itself.

But those of the great conquerors who have crossed the Hindu Kush often followed even shorter if more difficult routes. Alexander (328 B.C.) and Timur (A.D. 1398) crossed by the Khawak Pass (11,640 feet) and Babur (A.D. 1504) by the Qipchak Pass (13,900 feet). All the passes I have mentioned cross the main ridge along a line of about 150 miles of which the centre is approximately 60 miles due north of Kabul, and the main routes from all of them converge on to the Kabul plateau. To the east and west of this line along the 600-mile stretch of the Hindu Kush from the Chitral border to Herat lie other passes, but these are either so difficult in themselves or lead through such inhospitable and unfrequented country, as to present wellnigh insuperable barriers to the movements of large bodies of men and animals.



This then, in brief description, is the country of the Hindu Kush, a country little known and seldom visited by strangers. It is a country of extremes, of high barren plateaux and wide open stretches of sun-baked desert, of narrow fertile valleys, and rocky mountain spurs. Its climate varies from the bitter cold of the Kabul winter when the temperature frequently drops below zero Fahrenheit, to the great heat of the Oxus Valley where in summer a temperature of 110° is normal. The spring and autumn are temperate and surpassingly beautiful. It is a treeless wind-swept country, where in winter an icy blast blows off the high ridges, and in summer whirling 'devils' of sand and dust sweep across the open plains stirred by a hot wind which in the desert country of Sistan reaches a velocity of over 100 miles an hour. It is a dry country with an average rainfall of only eleven inches; its fertility depends mainly on winter snows which cover the high plateaux from December till March and, filling the deep mountain springs, provide irrigation water throughout the year. But of its total area of 250,000 square miles only about 20,000 square miles are cultivated. Much of the remainder provides seasonal grazing, and the great flocks of sheep which follow the grazing up on to the high pastures furnish the principal industry and the main source of income of its inhabitants.

But it is above all an intensely interesting country, remote, wild and very beautiful, with a story which goes back 2,500 years, during which it has been the scene of many of the vital movements of history. For it contains within it the dividing line which separates Southern from Central Asia. The mountains of the Hindu Kush projecting from the main ranges of the Pamirs have served throughout the ages as a breakwater diverting westward the flood of the great migrations from further Asia and protecting the north-western approaches to India. They have served as a barrier, either to divert the course of migration, or to break the force of invasion. The barrier has not been sufficient to arrest the movements of the great conquerors, but it has protected India from the full force of the invading nomad hordes, and during the periods when India has been strong it has furnished a stable frontier for her empire. Only from the west where the mountains run down to the low hills by the Hari Rud has it been possible to outflank the Hindu Kush and find a passage for migration or for the invasion of the Persian conquerors who on three occasions

in history have pushed forward their boundaries into the country of the Hindu Kush and passed on from there to the conquest of northern India.

But while I propose in the opening chapters of this narrative to sketch briefly a description of the developments of Central Asian history as exemplified by some account of the early guardians of the Hindu Kush and of the great empires which waxed and waned under their sovereignty, I shall devote the major portion to a study of the history of the last 200 years. For it is during this period that the country of the Hindu Kush passed under the guardianship of the Durrani Afghans, and that political developments took place which profoundly affected the whole structure of Central Asia, and have led directly to the situation as we find it to-day. In these developments the mountain barrier of the Hindu Kush has played a great and in the end a decisive part.

The opening years of the nineteenth century witnessed the passing of the last great Empires of Central and Southern Asia of Asiatic origin and the rise of two Empires in Asia on wholly European foundations. These two Empires, the British and the Russian, advancing across Asia throughout the century from bases many thousands of miles apart, were driven forward by the necessity which impels civilization ever to press onwards in its search for a security which will stabilize its frontiers and safeguard its commerce. Such great movements are well known in history ; they continue until an empire either outruns its strength or until it finds a solid frontier by contact with an equally stable civilization beyond its borders, or by reaching a natural frontier such as a great mountain range, a desert or the sea. In the case of Russia and Britain we find two Empires groping forward into the vast unknown stretches of Central Asia, the former moving ever onwards as one lawless tribe or decaying corrupt principality after another furnished not so much a pretext as a compelling reason for further expansion, the latter stretching out an arm beyond the Indus seeking some stable element on which to base the defences of the north-western approaches to India. Between them, though at the time they hardly realized it, lay the line dividing Central from Southern Asia, and on the mountains of the Hindu Kush they founded a stability which has lasted for sixty years. I propose to consider in some detail how that

stability was achieved, what has been its effect on the recent history of India, and what may be the results of the withdrawal of British power and influence, which have for so long maintained the barrier and guarded the gates. For as history shows, the Hindu Kush is not in itself a structure which can safeguard the integrity of India. It marks the ethnic, geographic, and economic division between Central and Southern Asia and it is a strategic frontier on which a stable government may rest. But no mountain range, save possibly the Pamirs, is able of itself to ensure stability if the power behind it falters. Yet the fact that to-day, even as in the past, the mountains of the Hindu Kush are the true north-west frontier of India, is a matter of paramount importance to the future of that country.

Chapter II

THE EARLY EMPIRES

500 B.C.—A.D. 650

IN the preceding chapter I have endeavoured to describe the stage on which throughout history the drama of the Hindu Kush has been played. I have depicted it as it is to-day and as it probably was when the first recorded actors appeared before the footlights more than 2,500 years ago. It may be that in those early days there were some few differences in its appearance. The forests which to-day are confined to the remote Kunar Valley and to the southern regions of Khost may have stretched further west along the main range and northwards towards the Kabul plateau. At various times irrigation schemes and possibly a higher average rainfall have led to the agricultural development of certain areas which are now dried up and barren. The country round Balkh (Bactria) for instance must have been highly fertile, before the coming of the Mongols, while the Sasanid cities of Sistan, now half buried in the shifting sands of the Registan, were presumably the centre of an area less arid than it is to-day. Ghazni could hardly have attained the pre-eminence which in the eleventh century distinguished it among the cities of Central Asia had not the surrounding country been better adapted than it has been in modern times to sustain the capital city of an empire. But these developments, though giving rise to many interesting speculations, hardly affect the stage as a whole. Empires rose, flourished, decayed, and disappeared; as each new conquest succeeded the last, the centre of interest and of activity shifted, fresh irrigation schemes were devised and barren lands were made fertile; and then war and conquest, the ravages of some great nomad horde, obliterated the traces of past culture and civilization, till nothing was left save silence and desolation, and the great mountains brooding over the futilities of man.

Much of the history of these early Empires is obscure. Archaeological research which has uncovered so many records of

the past in the Near and Middle East is as yet in its infancy in the country of the Hindu Kush. Bactria, and particularly the site of the great old city of Balkh, has hardly been touched, the Sasanid cities of Sistan, the site of Mahmud's city of Ghazni and many other centres await excavation while much remains to be done in Kapisa (Begram) and among the old Buddhist cities in the Kabul River valley. And so it is that, while at times contemporary history or the stories of travellers illuminate for a moment the stage till the figures of the early conquerors stand out in relief against the background of the country, in many cases the story is obscure and the record fragmentary. The actors appear out of a mist of historical uncertainty, cross the stage while the footlights are so dim that the audience can hardly see them pass, play their role of which scant record now remains and disappear, leaving only the briefest impression of an empire which may have lasted for many hundreds of years. Patient research is gradually unveiling the past, but much time must intervene before a sure foundation can be found for a detailed history of the early Empires.

At the same time we have sufficient data to be able to discern in broad outline the pattern of the story, and, when placing it against the background of the country, to establish the general trend of movement and of the impulses which governed the rise and fall of the tide of human endeavour throughout the centuries from 500 B.C., when history first raises the curtain, to A.D. 1747, when the indigenous people of the Hindu Kush for the first time established themselves as rulers of the entire country. As we study the history of this period a more or less regular cycle emerges. On the one side are the high tablelands of Central Asia and the rich valley of the Oxus, on the other the valley of the Indus and beyond it the vast fertile plains of India. Periodically a race of conquerors appear on the Oxus and establish themselves in the northern areas of the country of the Hindu Kush. After a pause a forward impulse causes them to move across the passes or round the western flank of the mountains; another pause and they march on to the conquest of northern India. Once established in India the centre of interest and of sovereignty moves south, the fissiparous tendencies of the 'Great Divide' between Southern and Central Asia assert themselves and the areas north of the Hindu Kush break away, or are overrun by a

fresh swarm of conquerors while the southern empire is gradually absorbed into the body politic of India. At long intervals another and opposing factor is manifest when the indigenous people of India or of Persia find leaders to weld them for a period into a stable empire and so to give them the cohesion and strength to assert their sovereignty up to or on occasions beyond their natural frontiers. And thus for upwards of 2,000 years the tide of conquest rose and fell, pouring in great cascades over the breakwater of these most vital mountains, seeping through the passes, or flowing round the exposed western flank, to surge onwards to the south where it spread out, stayed and finally was absorbed in the great open spaces of India.

The earliest mention of the country of the Hindu Kush is to be found in Persian literary records, the Avesta, dating from pre-Achaemenian times. Under Darius the Great (*c.* 500 B.C.) it formed part of the Achaemenian Empire, which for a brief time extended from the Jaxartes (Sri Darya) to Macedonia and included the country as far south as the Indus. By the middle of the fourth century B.C. the tide of conquest was receding, and the Indian country south of the Hindu Kush had broken away from the Persian Empire. Alexander encountered no Persian officials on his march eastward through India, and the Indians present at the final stand of the Persian armies against Alexander at Gaugamela (331 B.C.) came from the Indian belt which formed part of the Persian satrapy of Arachosia (Qandahar). The defeat of the Persians at Gaugamela and the death of Darius Codomanus, the last of the Achaemenian dynasty, in 330 B.C. left Alexander free to pursue his conquests to the furthest limits of the Persian Empire. In 329 B.C. he entered the country of the Hindu Kush and led the Macedonian army up the long gentle slopes by Ghazni, across the watershed into the Kabul River valley, along the same route down which General Roberts led a British force in the once famous Kabul-Qandahar march some 2,200 years later. Alexander spent the winter in the Koh-i-Daman Valley north of Kabul where he founded a city, Alexandria-under-the-Caucasus, either on or near the site of Kapisa (Begram) overlooking the Ghorband River. The site was well chosen. It lies in what is now and perhaps was then a beautiful well-watered valley filled with vineyards and walnut trees, and commanding three of the main roads across the passes of the Hindu Kush. From

here Alexander set out in the spring of 328 B.C. across the Khawak Pass to conquer and to colonize the rich lands of the Oxus valleys. He took a year to accomplish his purpose and to garrison the towns abutting on the Oxus. In 327 B.C. he was back on the southern side of the mountains, whence he moved down the Kabul River towards India. His army of some 25,000 to 30,000 men was now a mixed one. His heavy infantry was Macedonian, and for light-armed he had his original Cretan and Balkan formations; but the cavalry consisted largely of native horsemen from Bactria and from every country east of the Persian desert who were brigaded with such squadrons as remained of his own Companion cavalry. The main body of the army moved by the route south of the Kabul River while Alexander himself with a detachment turned up the Kunar Valley to deal with certain hostile tribes on his northern flank, and crossed the present Pakistan frontier between the Kunar and Panjkora Rivers in southern Chitral.¹

And so the first of the great conquerors of whom we have record passed out of the country of the Hindu Kush never to return. He left behind him the nucleus of a Greek colonial empire in Bactria and on the southern side of the mountains established the satrapy of the Paropamisadae.

The death of Alexander in 323 B.C. caused a rapid breakup of the Empire he had overrun but had not consolidated. In the west a period of strife ensued, known as the 'Wars of the Successors' which lasted for twenty years (321-301 B.C.), while in the east the rise of the Maurya dynasty under its founder, Chandragupta, consolidated the peoples of northern India under one head. The tide of conquest began to flow again from the south towards its natural frontier, and when in 305 B.C. Seleucus, founder of the Macedonian dynasty of the Middle East which bears his name, was able to turn his attention to his eastern provinces he found the Mauryas too strong for him. By a

¹ The Afridis of the Khyber claim to have exacted toll from Alexander for right of passage down the Pass. This attractive story can I fear hardly be sustained against modern research. Apart from the fact that it is at least doubtful whether there were any Pathan tribes as far east as the Khyber in 327 B.C., recent investigations show that Alexander did not follow the Kabul River below its junction with the Kunar (see *On Alexander's Track to the Indus* by the late Sir A. Stein). The main body of the Macedonian army may have gone down the Khyber, but more probably followed the course of the Kabul River into the Peshawar Valley where they were later joined by Alexander.

convention drawn up on the banks of the Indus Chandragupta acquired suzerainty over most of the country south of the mountains, though the Mauryas do not appear to have established full authority up to the Hindu Kush until the time of Asoka some sixty years later (*c.* 250 B.C.).

Meanwhile in the north, after some two generations of Seleucid rule, Bactria broke away from the Seleucid Empire and became a separate Greek kingdom. After the battle of Magnesia (189 B.C.) a period of Bactrian expansion ensued. The Greeks crossed the Hindu Kush in about 184 B.C. and seizing the opportunity afforded by the breakup of the Maurya Empire moved south to the conquest of northern India. For a brief space Greek rule extended from the Jaxartes to the Gulf of Cambaye, and from the Persian desert to the Ganges. But internecine strife, so often fatal to the consolidation of Greek sovereignty, and pressure from the north of the rising power of Parthia, so weakened the Bactrian Empire that somewhere between 141 and 128 B.C. Greek sovereignty north of the Hindu Kush was no longer able to resist fresh invasions from the north-east and disappeared, though the Greek Empire in India continued for another seventy years.

Greek rule in Bactria thus lasted for approximately 200 years, and might well have continued had not the desire for conquest—impelled its rulers to divide their Empire by crossing its powerful southern frontiers, and dissipating their resources in expansion instead of maintaining and strengthening their northern boundaries against the ever-present danger from the nomads. Little trace of Greek colonization remains to-day, save in the coins which testify to the strong virile type from which their rulers sprang, and in some of the few archaeological remains which have come to light. But the influence of Hellenistic art and culture remained for many centuries after their kingdom had been swept away. The people of the Hindu Kush at the time of Alexander's invasion were probably Indo-Iranians, whose modern representatives may perhaps be the Tajiks.¹ Over these people with their feudal system of landowners and serfs to cultivate the soil, the Greeks established their rule and in their midst set up their military colonies. Though the idea of the walled village itself, in Western Asia, is apparently pre-Iranian it was from these colonies and parallel with them that there developed in Bactria that system of

¹ Tajiks: see Pt. II, Ch. I.

self-governing walled villages which has remained a feature of this country ever since. This system of self-contained communities, and the influence of Hellenistic art, which continued in Bactria long after the Greek dominion had vanished, were the two most enduring achievements of the Greek colonists of Central Asia.

At the close of the Greek period the major portion of the inhabitants of Bactria, though much influenced by Hellenistic art and culture, retained most of the characteristics of the Iranian civilization of which under the Achaemenids they had formed part. They were in fact Iranians of the same race, and speaking the same language as the Iranians of the west, agriculturists and small farmers, owners of cattle and sheep and noted for their horse-breeding and horsemanship, an art which they had possibly acquired from their nomad neighbours of the north. But dwelling as they did in separate village communities they relied on their Greek rulers for cohesion and defence, and when this was dissipated and weakened they had little or no power of resistance to the ever-growing pressure of the nomads from the north and east.

This pressure was due to causes on which no agreement has been reached. It is considered by some historians to have originated in alternating periods of humidity and aridity working in 600-year cycles, by others the building of the Great Wall of China (third century B.C.) is held to have been the principal factor in turning the tide of migration westwards. Others again attribute the movement not to physical but to mental causes, and suggest that the migrations of this period are forerunners of Mongol imperialism to be developed later to its fullest extent by Chenghiz Khan. Whatever the root cause of these migrations may have been, the actual southern and south-western movements through Central Asia which began somewhere about 175 B.C. owed their immediate origin to the pressure of the Hiung-nu, usually supposed to be the ancestors of the Huns, on the borders of the Yue-chi.

The Yue-chi moving southwards crossed the Oxus in about 128 B.C., and after destroying or driving out the Greek rulers occupied the country as far south as the mountains.

There is no certainty as to who the Yue-chi were. They were certainly not Mongols, and were possibly of the same stock as the

Iranians and kin to the Kuchas of the Gobi whom Hsuan-Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, encountered on his journey westward in the seventh century A.D. They occupied such portions of Bactria as they required and, since they had nothing to replace it, left intact the general structure of Greek administration to become the framework of the Kushan Empire which eventually emerged from the intermingling of the Yue-chi overlords and the settled city dwellers of Bactria.

By the middle of the first century A.D. the Kushans under their ruler Kadphises I had crossed the Hindu Kush and assumed control of the Kabul River valley and of Gandhara, where they encountered and defeated the Sakas who had entered northern India about a hundred years earlier after passing round the western flank of the mountains. The Kushan Empire continued to expand into India at the expense of the Sakas and Parthians until at about the close of the first century A.D. the most noted of the Kushan dynasty, Kanishka, ruled from Peshawar an empire which extended from Benares in the south to the edge of the Gobi in the north. Little is known of this great Empire or of its culture. At its zenith the Kushan Kings were among the most powerful rulers of their time. They warred with the Parthians on their western frontier and in the north-east maintained relations with the great Han dynasty of China, so that the silk caravans from Peking could pass freely on their way through the Pamirs to Balkh and so southwards across the Hindu Kush to India. Under Kanishka, the Buddhist religion, spread throughout northern India by Asoka, reached its highest development and sent forth its missionaries along the great silk route to Mongolia and China, to carry into further Asia the teachings of the Master. It is strange to see to-day, as I have seen, in the country of the Hindu Kush from which all culture and art has long since disappeared, some of the beautiful treasures of the past, ivories from southern India, exquisite stained glass of Greek design, statues and vases of alabaster, dug from the ruins of what may have been the summer palace of the last Kushan Kings at Kapisa,¹ or to find in the remote valley of Bamiyan in the Hindu Kush the great statues of the Buddha still standing in their niches. The passing of the Kushan Empire marks the end of an epoch

¹ For an account of the finding of this treasure see *Blackwood's Magazine* for July 1944.

of civilization, and culture and art which endured for close on 800 years and the like of which has not again been seen in the central valleys of the Hindu Kush.

During the two following centuries, the third and fourth of our era, we find once more, after a lapse of some 600 years, the indigenous people of India and Persia reasserting themselves so that for a period the tide of conquest sets in again from the west and south. At the beginning of the third century Ardashir, a vassal King under the Parthian dominion, overthrew the last of the Parthian monarchs at the battle of Hormuz, and founded the great Sasanian dynasty which was to rule over the Persian Empire for the next 400 years. Ardashir carried his conquests to the borders of Bactria, and invaded India as far as Sirhind in the Panjab. This wave of conquest did not involve the northern and central portions of the Kushan Empire, but in A.D. 320 the rise of the Gupta Empire of India threatened it from the south.

And then a fresh wave of nomad invaders appeared on the Oxus. About the beginning of the fourth century the Ephthalites, or White Huns, a savage people of obscure origin, overran Bactria, defeating the Kushans whom they drove south. A hundred years later they crossed the Hindu Kush and for a time ruled over all northern India. But their dominion was brief. In the sixth century the Indian peoples rose against them while in the north an alliance between the Persians and the 'Tu-Kuie or Turks, a branch of the Hiung-nu tribes of eastern Mongolia, enabled the Sasanid Emperor Khusrau Anushirwan to regain for Persia after a lapse of 800 years the whole country of the Hindu Kush.

Chapter III

THE RISE OF ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

(A.D. 650-1218)

UP to this point (c. A.D. 650) the cycle of invasion, expansion, and decline has been regular, as one empire succeeded another in the virile north, only to dissipate its resources of strength in the vast enervating plains of India. It has only been broken when after long intervals the indigenous peoples of India and Persia managed to absorb the strangers in their midst, and for a time to turn the tide of conquest. There now follows a period of some 350 years, during which the Turkish rulers who had quickly supplanted the Persian overlords of the country of the Hindu Kush were themselves gradually dominated by the rising power of Islam.

We get for a brief moment, before the Arab invaders destroyed the last remnants of the older Buddhist and still older Zoroastrian culture, a glimpse of the country as it was in the middle of the seventh century A.D. from the records of Hsuan-Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, who passed through it from Balkh to India at that time. He found in the north a Turkish ruler, son of the great Khan of the Western Turks, a devout Buddhist who treated his revered guest with kindness and sent him to visit Balkh before starting on his difficult journey across the mountains. At Balkh Hsuan-Tsang found that, in spite of the ravages of the Ephthalites, there were still a hundred monasteries in and round a city lying amid fertile lands and valleys, where to-day there is only desolation and an arid waste. He crossed the Hindu Kush with no small hardship by a route 'twice as difficult and dangerous as in the region of the deserts and glaciers' and reached Bamiyan, at that time a flourishing community, including ten monasteries set in that high beautiful valley in the heart of the mountains through which all the caravans from China passed on their journey down to India, and where to-day a small community

of poverty-stricken Hazarahs, descendants of the Mongols of Chenghiz Khan, scratch a bare living from the soil.

And so Hsuan-Tsang passed down the Ghorband Valley on the southern watershed of the mountains till he reached Kapisa, still standing on the high bank of the river where Alexander founded it nearly a thousand years before. There he found a Turkish (or Ephthalite) ruler whose dominion extended as far as the Indus and who, commanding as he did the main trade routes to India, was of sufficient importance to send a present of horses, for which the country was then famous, to the Son of Heaven, the Emperor Tai-Tsang, and to receive presents in exchange. Thence the pilgrim passed by the Laghman (Lampaka) Valley into India, noting as he passes the contrast between the fierce tribesmen of the mountains, and the more effeminate Indians of the lower valleys, who 'live in ease and happiness . . . are pusillanimous and given to fraud . . . clothed in white cotton, adorned with coloured ornaments'.

The picture he draws, so faithful in its detail, is of a peaceful pleasant land, still retaining in spite of the ravages of the Huns much of the ancient culture and civilization derived from the intermingling of Greek art and Buddhist faith.¹

This ancient culture and civilization was now finally to pass away. By the middle of the seventh century the Arabs, driving eastwards under the influence of Islamic zeal for conquest, overthrew the Sasanids and reached the western borders of Persia. At the same time an expedition dispatched from Basra entered Sistan, and moved forward as far as the Kabul River valley, where the ruler submitted, but was allowed to retain the throne under Arab sovereignty. The Arabs were now in direct conflict with the great though loosely knit confederacy of the Western Turks. The struggle for domination was prolonged, and it was not until the rise of the Abbasid dynasty of Caliphs in the middle of the eighth century that their most redoubted general Abu Muslim was successful in winning over the entire Turkish population of Khurasan to the side of Islam. A period of peace followed when under the Caliph Harun-al-Rashid (785-809) and his son Mamun the arts and sciences flourished and were deeply studied, and Merv and Samarqand to the north became famous seats of learning.

¹ René Grousset, *In the Footsteps of the Buddha*.

Of the country of the Hindu Kush little is known during this period. For a time from 817 to 943 as the power of the Caliphs waned three short-lived dynasties exercised power in Herat and Balkh. The best known of these, the Samanids, for some years extended their dominion from the borders of India westwards to near Baghdad. In the north and west the influence of the golden age of Abbasid culture was strong, while in the southern and central regions the Arabs, penetrating deeply, gradually blotted out the older faiths and substituted Islamic for Buddhist doctrines.

But as Samanid influence waned, Hindu dominion again reasserted itself for a brief moment and for the last time in the Kabul Valley. For as the Raja of the Panjab, Jaipal, pushed his boundaries westward towards Ghazni he came in contact with a newly founded Islamic dynasty which was to alter the whole history of India, and to bring the full force of the fanatical monotheistic doctrines of Islam to bear against the ancient polytheistic philosophy and faith of Hinduism. The eleventh century of our era is of vital importance in Indian history. The Arab conquest of Sind had brought Islam to India three and a half centuries before. But now for the first time a great conqueror, or more properly a great raider, appeared on its north-western borders, whose iconoclastic zeal was to carry fire and sword deep into Hindu India and to pave the way for the domination of his Islamic successors.

Some ninety miles south-west of Kabul, sheltering beneath a projecting spur of the main range and just on the Qandahar side of the watershed, lies a great area of mounds and rubble with the two 'Towers of Victory' standing broken and lonely in its midst. This and the Tomb of Sultan Mahmud still standing a short distance away is all that is left of the famous city of Ghazni, once the capital of a great military empire, and unsurpassed as a centre of learning and of art.

The Yamini dynasty of Ghazni was founded in the middle of the tenth century by Alptigin, a Turkish slave in the service of the Samanids, who broke away from his masters as the authority of the Samanids waned in the face of the rising power of their Turkish adherents. Alptigin's successor Sabuktigin extended his dominion over all the country of the Hindu Kush into Khurasan on the west, but left it to his son to follow the pattern of the past by carrying his invasions into India.

Mahmud, the third and greatest of the line, first consolidated his position in the north against the Uighur Turks who under their leaders, the Ilak Khans, had overthrown the last of the Samanids and had penetrated south of the Oxus. He then turned his attention to India against which he carried out a series of raiding forays on a grand scale, when the iconoclastic zeal of Islam and the predatory instincts of a highland chieftain seem to have been equally blended. Between A.D. 1001 and 1026 he made twelve such expeditions, during the most famous of which he penetrated as far as Kathiawar, and removed from its sacred temple the great idol and the gates of Somnath.¹ With the booty thus obtained from the rich cities of India, he beautified and expanded his capital, endowed universities and seats of learning, and built the great Mosque known as the 'Bride of Heaven' to commemorate his exploits. His services in the cause of Islam were recognized by the Caliph, and at his death in A.D. 1030 he was ruler of a dominion which included not only the country of the Hindu Kush but also the Panjab in India and vast territories beyond the Oxus.

The fortunes of this great Empire followed the pattern of its predecessors. Founded by a military genius it did not long survive his decease. In the north the Tu-kuic or Turkish races whose westward migration had for a time been arrested and submerged by the eastward thrust of Arab conquest, now resumed their march. Under the banner of Islam to which they had been converted, the Seljuks who had supplanted the Uighurs were gathering that strength which was to carry their Empire from the Chinese frontier to the Mediterranean Sea, and there find a permanent home in Anatolia whence at a later date emerged their successors, the Ottoman Turks.

Southwards the Turks beat upon the defences of the Ghaznavid Empire at a time (A.D. 1038) when the lure of easy conquest in India had induced Masud I to seek to emulate the prowess of his illustrious father. From this time forward the Empire of Mahmud crumbled before the Turks and finally, in face of the

¹ In the belief that the gates on Mahmud's tomb were in fact the gates of the temple of Somnath Lord Ellenborough caused them to be brought back to India in 1842, at the close of the First Afghan War, as proof of British regard for the honour of India. This rather absurd gesture was greeted with ridicule, and the gates, which were of local origin, were placed in the Fort at Agra where they remain dusty and forgotten.

Ghorid dynasty, which for a brief space maintained itself in the highlands of the western Hindu Kush. It was a Ghorid monarch, Ala-ud-din, who in 1140 captured and burnt to the ground the magnificent city of Ghazni, a deed for which he received the title of Jahan-Suz (The Earth-burner), and it was one of his successors, Muiz-ud-din, who in 1186 finally uprooted from their last defences in the Panjab, the remaining decadent representatives of the Yamini dynasty of Ghazni. But the Ghorids soon gave way to the Turks. By the beginning of the thirteenth century Kutb-ud-din, Turkish founder of the Slave Dynasty of Delhi, was in possession of northern India, while the Khwarizm Shah had extended his power southward over most of the country of the Hindu Kush. But the great tide of invasion was once more setting strongly from the east, the Mongols were on the move from northern China, and by A.D. 1218 had already reached far into Central Asia.

Chapter IV

MONGOLS AND TIMURIDS

(A.D. 1218-1506)

THE Mongol invasions of Central Asia and of Europe were, until the rise of the Nazis under Hitler, the greatest catastrophe which has befallen mankind. Pouring forth from further Asia early in the thirteenth century the hordes of Chenghiz Khan descended on to the rich centres of commerce and culture lying between the Jaxartes (Sri Darya) and Persia, and destroyed without mercy not only the people of the areas they conquered, but their cities, their shrines and their means of livelihood, until the country they passed over lay desolate for generations and the desert encroached once more on to the lands reclaimed from it by its former owners.

Under their redoubtable leader Chenghiz Khan, the Mongols overthrew the Khwarizm Shah Muhammad, ruler at this time of an empire which included all the country of the Hindu Kush as far south as the Indus, and forced him to flee south across the Oxus and then west into Persia, where he died. By 1220 Chenghiz Khan was on the Oxus, and sending an army to subdue Badakhshan, himself advanced against the city of Balkh, which was unfortified and surrendered. He destroyed this seat of ancient culture with its innumerable mosques and other great public buildings, and massacred its inhabitants. Then sending an army to destroy Herat he himself remained in the valley of the Oxus till the following year, when he crossed the mountains by the Ak Robot Pass in pursuit of the last representative of the Khwarizm Empire, Jalal-ud-din, who had taken refuge in Ghazni. As he passed down the southern valleys of the Hindu Kush, Chenghiz laid siege to and utterly destroyed the old Buddhist city in the Bamiyan Valley and the great red fort of Zohak, a few miles further to the east. He followed Jalal-ud-din southwards to the banks of the Indus, where in a last desperate stand the Turkish forces were finally defeated, though Jalal-ud-din escaped by swimming the great river at his back. The relentless Mongols

followed the shattered remnants of the Turkish army as far as Multan in the western Panjab. This was, however, the limit of their advance. Fearing the approach of the hot weather, always a deterrent to the Mongols, Chenghiz made his way up the river as far as Peshawar, which he destroyed, and by 1223 was once more across the Oxus, leaving ruin and desolation in his wake.

For the next hundred years the country of the Hindu Kush lay under the Mongol yoke. During part of this time it was ruled by Ogatai who succeeded his father, Chenghiz, as Khakan, and then on the division of the Empire it fell to the lot of Hulagu, founder of the dynasty of the Il-Khans of Persia. The local rulers were usually Turks, administering the country on behalf of their Mongol overlords, and the country itself was slowly recovering from the effects of the Mongol cataclysm.

During this period we get two glimpses of the state of the country from the records of travellers. From A.D. 1271 to 1275 Marco Polo was engaged in his journey from Acre to the Court of Kublai Khan, grandson of Chenghiz, and ruler of the eastern territories of the Mongol Empire. In the course of his journey he passed by Balkh, which he found still 'a noble city and a great' though much ravaged by Tatars.¹ Passing eastwards by Taican (Talikan) into Badakhshan his all too brief description of the country contains much that is familiar. The Mongols do not appear to have penetrated deeply into Badakhshan, and the royal house which claimed descent from Alexander² ruled over a great kingdom. He mentions the mountain 'in which azure is found', and from which the beautiful Afghan lapis lazuli still finds its way into the markets of India. He refers to the great flocks of sheep and the fine breed of horses which still roam the upland pastures of Badakhshan, and his description of the great mountains with their pure air and beautiful streams full of 'trout and many other fish of dainty kinds' is most vivid and true to fact. Of the people he has not much to say save that they were Muhammadans who talked a peculiar language and were excellent archers and much given to the chase. They lived in villages, perched on lofty hills, and in very strong positions, a survival no doubt of the fortified villages of Graeco-Bactrian times.³ From

¹ Sir Henry Yule, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Vol. I, Ch. xxvii.

² For an account of these descendants of Alexander, see Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Ch. vii, p. 301. The claim seems to have been largely fictitious.

³ See p. 19.

Badakhshan Marco Polo passed up the Wakhan Valley, by Lake Victoria (Zar Kul) on to the Pamir, 'to such a height that it is said to be the highest place in the world',¹ and so across to Kashgar.

Some sixty years later, in 1333, Ibn Batuta, the Moorish traveller, passing through Khurasan on his journey to India, found Balkh in ruins and deserted, while Herat had largely recovered from the ravages of a hundred years before. Crossing the mountains through the Andarab Valley and over the Khawak Pass Ibn Batuta rejoined the line of the Mongol advance and found the country devastated and uninhabited, where there had been 'once a fine and populous city built on a great river'—possibly Kapisa. Kabul was reduced to the size of a village and of Ghazni only a fraction remained. Qandahar alone appeared to have escaped the attentions of the Mongols, and is described in the narrative as a large and prosperous city, though Ibn Batuta did not himself visit it.² He seems to have been well received by the Turkish governor and to have travelled in safety as far as the borders of India, at that time the Indus River. He has, however, some complaint to make of a 'Persian tribe called Afghans' whose principal stronghold was the Koh-i-Sulaiman on the borders of India and who harassed his party on the road between Kabul and the Indus!

Mongol domination of the country of the Hindu Kush lasted for little over a hundred years. By the middle of the fourteenth century, while they still ruled vast territories in Central Asia from their capital Almalyk (Kuldja) on the Ili River, their hold on the lands south of the Sri Darya (Jaxartes) was relaxed and the country was divided into a number of small principalities, inhabited by Turks and in some cases ruled over by Turkish chieftains. All traces of the Mongols soon disappeared from the territories they had overrun save in the grim memorials of ruin and devastation which they left behind, and in the few colonies, such as the Mongol Hazarabs of western and central Afghanistan,³ which they established.

Their conquest did not therefore follow the pattern which we have traced through the previous fifteen hundred years, and which was to be repeated so faithfully in the Mogul Empire.

¹ Cf. Wood, *The Bam-i-Daniah or Roof of the World: Journey to the Source of the Oxus*, 1841.

² H. A. R. Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Batuta*.

³ Pt. II, Ch. I.

The reason for this would appear to be that the Mongols never seriously attempted the conquest of India. They occupied Ghazni whence they made devastating raids into northern India, and on one occasion, in 1299, attempted conquest. But their attempt failed and they did not repeat it. One finds it difficult to assign the true reason for the failure in India of the hordes which so successfully overran the Middle East and carried the famous banner of yaks' tails to the walls of Vienna. It seems probable that the barrier of the Hindu Kush warded off the full force of their aggression, and that those who penetrated into India were thwarted rather by the climate than by the military prowess of their adversaries. We have seen how in 1222 Chenghiz turned back from the siege of Multan at the approach of the hot weather, and it is probable that the Mongol leaders appreciated the effect that permanent occupation of northern India would have on men unacclimatized to the fierce heat of its sun-baked plains. The cycle of conquest was therefore in the case of the Mongols never completed; as their power waned their raiding forays gradually diminished and by the middle of the fourteenth century ceased altogether.

The relaxation of Mongol control permitted a Tajik dynasty, the Kurts, to establish themselves for a period in Herat, and at one time (1332-70) to attain virtual independence. By the end of this period, however, the greater part of the country of the Hindu Kush had come under the dominion of Timur-i-Lang (Tamerlane) (A.D. 1336-1404) who from his capital at Samarqand ruled by the end of the fourteenth century an empire which included the greater part of Asia south and west of the Ili River. Timur belonged to the Gurkhan branch of the Barlas Turks, and was descended through his mother from Chenghiz Khan. He crossed the Hindu Kush on several occasions. His most notable expedition was in 1398 when he invaded India and sacked Delhi, leaving in his wake a scene of massacre and desolation unsurpassed even by Mahmud of Ghazni. The ostensible reason for this expedition was the tolerance of the Islamic rulers of India towards the Hindus, and as ancillary to this pious objective he turned aside with part of his force on reaching the Khawak Pass in his southward journey to punish the idolatrous inhabitants of Kafiristan¹ on the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush. The

¹ For an account of the Kafirs of Kafiristan, see Pt. II, Ch. I.

story as given by Raverty is curious.¹ Timur and his force found themselves in that terrible tangle of ridge and valley which lies to the north of the Kabul River opposite the modern Jalalabad. The country was so steep that Timur himself was lowered down the precipitous sides of the valleys on a sledge supported by ropes while his officers lay on their shields and tobogganned over the surface of the snow! The expedition appears to have been successful, though the Kafirs were not finally subdued and converted to Islam for another 500 years.

Timur's reign was drawing to its close when in 1403 his court at Samarqand was visited by Clavijo, Ambassador of Henry III of Castile, who has left us a faithful account of the country through which he passed, and of the old man who, propped up with cushions and nearly blind, received the ambassador with kindness and entertained him royally. In his journey Clavijo passed through Balkh, where he found the inner city still inhabited, though the area between the outer and inner ramparts had been divided into fields where cotton was being grown, a statement which suggests that the irrigation system which had once fertilized the surrounding country had not been totally destroyed by the Mongols. He also notes the interesting fact that the Oxus formed the linguistic frontier between the Turki- and the Persian-speaking peoples.² Although he met many encampments of Chagatays, as he calls them, south and west of the Oxus, the language spoken 'commonly by all folk' was Persian, showing that the Mongols had made no very deep impression on the people in the country of the Hindu Kush. The situation is very different to-day in the Oxus Valley, where Turki is the universal language.³

Throughout the fifteenth century the Empire of Timur underwent the swift decay common to empires founded on the military genius of a single man. Up to the middle of the century the country of the Hindu Kush, the southern portion of which was at this time known as India the Less, was in the hands of Shah Rukh, son of Timur, under whose patronage the renaissance of Islamic art, culture, and learning, begun by his father, continued to flourish. But once again as the power of the foreign overlords waned, the vitality of the indigenous people reasserted itself.

¹ H. G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan*, p. 136, 1888.

² Le Strange, *Clavijo—Embassy to Tamerlane*.

³ See Pt. II, Ch. I.

The rise of the great Safavi dynasty in Persia, the realization of national unity in Russia after the breakup by Timur of the Golden Horde, and the growing strength of the Shaybani Uzbeks in Transoxiana pressed on the later Timurids who finally, driven southwards, founded in India a more durable Empire than the one they had lost in Central Asia.

Chapter V

THE MOGUL EMPIRE

(A.D. 1504-1747)

IN June 1504 Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur, with a few hundred followers, defeated and almost destitute, set out from his refuge in the hills of Farghana on the first stage of a journey which was to end in the founding of the Mogul Empire of India. His father Umar Shaikh was a great-great-grandson of Timur, and his mother a descendant from Chenghiz Khan in the thirteenth generation. Babur was therefore a Barlas Turk by race with a strong intermixture of Mongol blood, and the name Chagatai Turks given to his dynasty by his contemporaries, while emphasizing the Mongol connexion, was reasonably correct.

The breakup of the Empire founded by Timur was at this time proceeding apace. The Timurids, while fighting among themselves, were at the same time faced with the growing power of the Uzbeks, who under the leadership of Shaybani Khan, a descendant of Chenghiz's eldest son, were in possession of Samarqand.

From the age of twelve (1494) Babur's early life consisted of an unending and fruitless struggle with fickle friends and powerful enemies to gain possession of Timur's former capital of Samarqand, or at least to regain possession of his own dominion of Farghana. Twice he succeeded in re-entering his capital Andijan, and for a few months in holding Samarqand, only to be driven out by superior Uzbek forces. Finally in 1504, at the age of twenty-two, he decided to give up the unequal contest and to join his kinsman Husain Beg Baiqara, the ruler of Herat, which was at that time the foremost city of Asia and a brilliant centre of art and literature. With a handful of followers he crossed the Oxus in June of that year and moved first to the Kahmerd Valley on the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush. Here a welcome addition to his forces from among the followers of the ruler of Hisar, whose courage was failing him at the approach of the Uzbeks, caused him to revise his plans. Crossing the mountains by the Qipchak

Pass he descended the Ghorband Valley, and in October 1504, after a brief struggle, captured Kabul from a representative of the Mongol dynasty of the Il-Khans.

This change of plan was of the utmost significance for the future. The high plateau on which Kabul stands commands the main approaches to northern and central India, and while a great leader based on Herat, Ghazni, or Qandahar might carry out successful forays on the rich cities of India, no conqueror who aspired to permanent domination could afford to proceed with his task until he had secured this vital area. We have seen in the history of the early Empires the importance of Kapisa as a centre from which further expansion took its source. But Kapisa had disappeared, and Kabul, some forty miles to the south, had taken its place as a centre of trade and commerce, through which ran the main trade routes across the passes from Central Asia and from which radiated the principal strategic high roads into India. Babur not only recognized the strategic and economic importance of his new acquisition, but also appreciated the beauty of its surroundings and the excellence of its climate.¹ Like others who have for a period made it their home, his devotion to Kabul remained constant throughout the remainder of his life and amid scenes of conquest and of grandeur which might well have obliterated its rugged beauty from his mind. His memoirs show how often his thoughts reverted to his highland capital to which after his conquest of northern India he was never able to return, but where he was finally laid to rest under the great chenar trees of the Bagh-i-Babur.

Shortly after the capture of Kabul Babur set forth on his first expedition to India, a disastrous affair, chiefly owing to shortage of supplies and adverse weather conditions. He did not attempt a second expedition until 1519, but employed the intervening years in the gradual extension of his power over the southern country of the Hindu Kush, in the capture of Qandahar from the Arghans of the family of the Il-Khans, and in frequent expeditions against the Afghans. These people, whose origin and early history we shall consider in a later chapter,² were now for the first time emerging as a factor in the country which they inhabited, and to which they eventually gave their name. It is true that they had already appeared as a power in India, and that

¹ A. S. Beveridge, *Babur-Nama*, Vol. I, p. 199.

² Pt. II, Ch. I.

Babur's principal opponent in his final march into India was Ibrahim Lodi, the Afghan King of Delhi. But the northern Afghans, although mentioned in history as mountain highwaymen and robbers, do not appear before this time to have extended as far as the Hindu Kush or to have exerted any influence on the destinies of the country. Babur in fact limits the name Afghanistan to the country then inhabited by the Afghan tribes with which he came in contact lying mainly south of the Kabul-Peshawar road.¹ But he had many dealings with them, and considered them of sufficient importance to seek an alliance in 1519 by marriage with a Yusufzai lady, Bibi Mubarika, who died childless.

During this period Babur also sought to regain his lost dominions north of the Oxus. In 1506 Shaybani Khan captured Herat from the Timurids only to lose it and his life to Shah Ismail, founder of the Safavi dynasty of Persia, in 1509. On hearing of this Babur moved north to Qunduz, whence after enlisting the help of the Persians he advanced on and occupied Samarqand. But an alliance with so antagonistic a religious sect as the Shiah of Persia could not long prosper. The conditions imposed by Shah Ismail were irksome and jeopardized Babur's position with his Sunni followers. He dismissed his Persian allies but as a man of honour fulfilled the conditions which had secured them. The result was disastrous. He was driven out of Samarqand by the Uzbeks on a wave of Sunni fanaticism and by 1514 was once more in Kabul.

In the meantime Shah Ismail had consolidated his position in Herat and had taken Balkh from the Uzbeks. Badakhshan still remained under Babur's control and was placed in charge of Humayun, his eldest son, who ruled from Faizabad, where his father paid him a brief visit in 1521. Babur also seems to have retained some connexion with Balkh, where a Timurid relation ruled the province on behalf of the Safavis, and where Babur's presence in 1525 just before he set out for India served to deter the Uzbeks from besieging it.

But it is evident that Babur, having failed to regain his lost possessions in the north, was not content to remain a minor potentate ruling over the barren mountains and sparsely cultivated plains of the country between the Hindu Kush and the Indus

¹ A. S. Beveridge, *Babur-Nama*, Vol. I, p. 200.

Valley, where the wild Afghan tribes were a perpetual source of disturbance to the countryside and a menace to communications and commerce. By 1525 he felt that his base in Kabul was sufficiently secure. In front of him was an India torn by internal dissensions and hatred of the ruler, Ibrahim Lodi, and on 18 October of that year he set out on his march to Delhi.

The story of his advance may be briefly told. At Bagh-i-Wafa (Nimla) he was joined by a force from Badakhshan under Humayun, and on 16 December his force, numbering 12,000 men, crossed the Indus by ferry. As he moved through the Panjab he was joined by supporters from among the former Turkish rulers of Lahore and by 13 March had news of the advance of Ibrahim Lodi from Delhi. The armies met on 2 April 1526 near Panipat. After some days spent in preliminary skirmishing battle was joined on 20 April, and ended in a complete defeat for the forces of Hindustan in which Ibrahim was killed. Babur dispatched Humayun with light forces to occupy Agra, and other leaders to seize Delhi and its treasury. He himself followed a few days later to Agra where he found among the treasures seized by Humayun a great diamond known as 'The Great Mogul'.¹

The remaining years of Babur's life were spent in consolidating the position he had won in India. The country of the Hindu Kush, though only partly under Babur's control and now merely an outlying province of his Empire, was still frequently in his thoughts. His second son, Kamran, a lad of eighteen, was in charge in Kabul where, considering the explosive nature of its inhabitants, conditions remained remarkably peaceful. In 1529 Babur instructed Humayun, who had returned to Badakhshan, to make a further attempt to regain Samarqand, and the insistence of his orders shows that the old Emperor had never abandoned the hope, even in the midst of his Indian campaigns, of recovering his territories beyond the Oxus. But the attempt failed, and Humayun returned to Agra a few months before his father's death in December 1530.

History has tended to allow Babur's memory to be overshadowed by that of his illustrious grandson Akbar, during whose reign the Mogul Empire of India rose to its greatest extent and magnificence. But Babur was one of the outstanding figures of his age. He

¹ Probably identical with the Koh-i-Nur.

combined many qualities : besides being a great military leader and a courageous soldier, he was a man of culture and accomplishments, a lover of letters and poetry with a keen power of observation and appreciation of the beauties of nature. But above all his memoirs show a man of broad humanity and understanding, a born leader whose patience and resolution in adversity were only equalled by his forbearance and generosity when success crowned his efforts. Few men, particularly in Asia, can have met with so many misfortunes and disasters and yet retained the allegiance and respect of their countrymen and followers.

I have devoted some space to an account of the foundation of the Mogul Empire, partly because Babur was the last and best known of the great conquerors to cross the Hindu Kush, and partly because his movements follow with much accuracy the pattern of his predecessors. There is so far as I know no evidence that Babur was inspired by the example set by Alexander and elaborated by his successors, but the stages are clearly marked ; his venture across the Oxus, his accretion of strength on the north side of the Hindu Kush, his descent on Kabul, and the consolidation of his position in India the Less preparatory to his march on Delhi.

Once the Empire was founded the centre of sovereignty and interest shifted as formerly to India, where the fortunes of the new dynasty remained doubtful until in 1556 Akbar, who had just succeeded his father, Humayun, finally established Mogul rule on the historic field of Panipat. From then onwards the country of the Hindu Kush became an outpost of the Empire, guarding the gates of its northern and north-western frontiers. As such it continued for close on 200 years to be a battle-ground in which the great powers which bordered on it strove for the possession of its frontier towns.

It was a three-cornered contest in which the Uzbegs fought with the Moguls for the possession of Badakhshan and with the Persians for Herat, while the Persians and Moguls disputed the ownership of Qandahar. The course of the struggle shows how since Babur's time the centre of Mogul interest had become focused on India, rather than on Central Asia. No longer was there any question of the recovery of Samarqand or the Trans-Oxus territories. To Akbar even the continued possession of Badakhshan had ceased to be a matter of first importance, while

on the other hand he strove unceasingly to regain control of Qandahar; realizing, as others have done since, that the Qandahar route was the only approach to India which outflanked the great barrier. But if Akbar realized this, so also did the Persians. While during the time that the Mogul power was at its height they never attempted to advance beyond Qandahar, they never relaxed for long their efforts to retain it.

The first round of this contest went to the Persians, who in 1558 seized Qandahar. This was followed twenty-six years later by the occupation of Badakhshan by the Uzbegs. The menace to Kabul and the main approaches to India by these threats from the north-west and north did not escape Akbar, who however found it necessary to strengthen his hold on his line of communications by subduing the eastern Afghan tribes and by instituting a system of allowances to the Afridis to keep the Khyber Pass open, before he set to work to restore the position. In 1595 he recaptured Qandahar, which remained in his hands until his death in 1605, while Shah Abbas of Persia succeeded in once more driving the Uzbegs out of Herat, which remained in Persian possession until it was captured by the Abdali Afghans in 1716.

Under the Emperor Jahangir the struggle for Qandahar continued. In 1622 it was recaptured by the Persians, but after the death of Shah Abbas in 1629 the Mogul Emperor Shah Jahan renewed the attack and retook the city in 1637. Two years later he sent his son Murad across the mountains to retake Badakhshan. Murad was successful and reoccupied both Balkh and Termez which remained in Mogul hands till 1647. But they no longer had the will or perhaps the power to resist constant pressure from the Uzbegs for the possession of a country so far removed from their centre. In 1648 the imperial armies withdrew from the Oxus Valley and retired on Kabul.

A year later this weakening of Mogul power in the north had its inevitable reactions on the Persians, who under Shah Abbas II recaptured Qandahar and threatened Ghazni. Attempts by Aurangzeb to oust the Persians failed and in 1658 a rising of the Afghan tribes to the east threatened his hold on what was left to him of the country of the Hindu Kush. The death of Shah Abbas II in 1666 removed the immediate menace of Persia, but the Afghan tribes round the Khyber proved a tough nut to crack,

and the rebellion was not settled till 1675. Aurangzeb, the last of the great Mogul Emperors, died in 1707. His intense suspicion of his fellow men and consequent centralization of the affairs of his vast dominions undermined the fabric of the Empire, which rapidly fell to pieces in the hands of his weak successors before the onslaught of the Mahrattas in the south and of the Persians in the north-west.

Before, however, going on to review the spectacular entry of Nadir Shah of Persia upon the scene, we must consider briefly the curious turn of fortune which placed two Ghilzai chiefs for a short time on the Persian throne.

An account of the origin and history of the Ghilzais is given elsewhere in this book.¹ Though probably not true Afghans, they have assimilated many of their characteristics and speak the same language. At the close of the seventeenth century this powerful tribe inhabited the area round Qandahar, and early in the eighteenth century had taken advantage of the growing weakness of the later Safavis and Moguls to assume virtual independence. In 1721 the Ghilzai chief Mahmud, after discovering in the course of one successful raid that Safavi resistance was not likely to prove difficult to overcome, advanced on Isfahan. The defeat of a far larger Persian force at Gulnabad enabled Mahmud to lay siege to Isfahan, which capitulated after seven months' resistance, whereupon the Ghilzai chief mounted the throne of the Safavis.

In 1725 Mahmud was murdered, and was succeeded by his cousin Ashraf, who shortly afterwards defeated Tahmasp, the third son of the ex-Shah Sultan Husain, and seized Tehran. The Ghilzai was, however, in a precarious position. He was ruling by force of arms a people who greatly outnumbered his adherents, and who detested him on religious and racial grounds. Moreover Mahmud's brother Husain had made himself supreme among the Ghilzais of Qandahar, and Ashraf could consequently look neither for sympathy nor for reinforcements from that quarter. The position of a nomad chieftain ruling over a civilized community is certain to be unstable, and is rarely lasting unless the ruler himself is something more than a successful warrior.²

¹ Pt. II, Ch. I.

² See *A Study of History*, by A. J. Toynbee, Vol. III, p. 24, for an analysis of this question.

In this case as in others the Ghilzais owed their success in Persia to the decadence of the ruling house. They could not hope to survive as rulers of the Shah's dominions in the face of any leader who could command the respect and allegiance of the Persian people.

Such a leader was now forthcoming. Nadir Quli Beg, afterwards Nadir Shah, of the Qiriqlu branch of the Afshars, a tribe of Turkish origin, was born in Khurasan in 1688. In 1726 he joined Tahmasp's forces and showed early promise of powers of leadership and of military genius. Three years later he had attained a predominating position in the service of his master and set to work to restore the power of the Safavis in Persia. His first task was to subdue the great Abdali Afghan clan of Herat, as a preliminary to an attack on the Ghilzais at Isfahan. By 1729 the Abdali chiefs had been defeated and tendered submission, several of them entering the Shah's forces. Nadir then moved against the Ghilzais. In a series of encounters he completely broke the power of the Ghilzais who evacuated Isfahan, where a few weeks later Nadir restored Tahmasp to the throne of his fathers.

A further revolt of the Abdalis led to the capture of Herat in 1732, but it was not till 1736 that Nadir, who had by this time deposed the Shah, Abbas III, and had himself been crowned, was free to attack the Ghilzais in their stronghold, Qandahar. The campaign lasted till March 1738, by which time Zamindwar, Kalat-i-Ghilzai, and much of Baluchistan had been overrun by the Persians. Qandahar resisted valiantly, but finally surrendered. The north-western bastion of the defences which the Moguls had striven for so long to secure was in the hands of another of the great raiders, and the road to India lay open.

The pretext given by Nadir for his invasion of the Mogul Empire was his desire to punish certain Afghan refugees who had crossed the Indian frontier during his operations against the Ghilzais. There is, however, no doubt that his real reason was the intention to emulate the exploits of Alexander, Mahmud, and Timur, and at the same time to extract from the wealthy and decadent Mogul Empire sufficient booty and treasure to pay the armies he would require for further campaigns against Turkey.

Nadir set out from Qandahar for Ghazni in May 1738 and crossed the Indian frontier at Chasham-i-Mukhmur, believed to

be the modern Mukkur, a few days later. He met with no organized resistance until he reached Kabul, Ghazni having surrendered without a struggle. At Kabul the notables of the city came out to make submission but the citadel held out till the end of June. In September Nadir set out for Peshawar. He encountered and defeated some Afghan tribesmen in the hills near Gandamak, and after passing through Jalalabad outflanked an opposing force in the Khyber Pass and arrived before Peshawar, which capitulated without resistance.

At the beginning of 1739 Nadir set out for Delhi. Resistance was spasmodic and half-hearted until he reached Karnal on the historic battle-ground of India. Here the army of the Mogul Emperor, Muhammad Shah, some 80,000 strong, was drawn up to contest the approaches to Delhi, but after a day's fighting in which only a portion of the two forces was engaged Muhammad Shah abandoned the contest and abdicated in favour of Nadir Shah. Terms of peace were arranged, the Indian army which was closely blockaded in its camp by the Persians melted away and the two monarchs proceeded to Delhi.

Nadir Shah remained in Delhi for a period of two months. Shortly after his arrival a clash between the citizens and the Persian Qizilbash troops led to a massacre of the former during which 20,000 persons are said to have been slain. This was followed by a levy on the citizens and by general looting in the course of which the accumulated treasure of the Mogul dynasty 'changed owners in a moment'. Included in the booty which Nadir received from the Emperor was the famous Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Nur diamond.

By the middle of May Delhi was getting uncomfortably hot, and Nadir, having accomplished his purpose, decided to set out on his homeward march. He restored the crown of Hindustan to the Emperor, who in return transferred to the sovereignty of Persia all Mogul territories to the north and west of the River Indus, much of which as a matter of fact had already been acquired by Nadir. He set out shortly afterwards and reached Qandahar in 1740 after an absence of just over two years.

In the autumn of 1740 Nadir undertook the acquisition of the territories north of the Hindu Kush, including the Trans-Oxus lands as far as Samarqand, as well as Bukhara and Khiva, until his conquests reached nearly as far to the east as the limits of the

Persian Empire of Darius. He returned to Meshed, now his capital, at the beginning of 1741.

For the remainder of his life Nadir's campaigns were chiefly in the west against Turkey and in the Persian Gulf. But the cost of these campaigns imposed a fearful drain on the resources of Persia, the burden of which was in no way lightened by the increasing savagery of the Shah's character. By 1747 the Shah's mind was showing signs of derangement, and his barbarities were increasing with advancing years. His people were being goaded to desperation and only the presence in his army of many thousands of Afghans and other foreign mercenaries prevented a mutiny among the Persian troops. The final tragedy took place near Khabushan (Quchan) where the Shah was encamped with his forces on his way to deal with a revolt of Kurds of that area. The commander of the Afghan bodyguard was Ahmad Shah Abdali, the second son of Muhammad Zaman Khan Sadozai, who owed his rapid rise in the Shah's service to his zeal and to his military qualities. At Khabushan Nadir, filled with some presentiment of impending tragedy, ordered his Afghan officers to arrest on the following morning all the officers of the Persian forces whose loyalty he no longer trusted. This order was conveyed by a spy to the Persians who resolved to strike at once. That night three of the conspirators entered the Shah's sleeping tent and murdered him as he sprang from his bed. A scene of terrible confusion followed. Ahmad Shah and his Afghans were greatly outnumbered by the Qizilbash guards, and after ascertaining that Nadir was really dead fought their way out of the camp and succeeded in reaching Qandahar in safety.

Part II

THE KINGDOM OF AFGHANISTAN

Chapter I

THE AFGHANS AND OTHER RACES OF THE HINDU KUSH

WE have now reached the point in history where the country of the Hindu Kush emerges as a separate entity and with a name which includes for the first time both the northern and southern glacis of the mountains. In the next 200 years Afghanistan will go through many vicissitudes. Afghan rulers will at one time hold dominion over an Empire of vast extent, at another they will retain precarious possession of an area no larger than the present Kabul province. These, however, are passing phases. The kingdom of Afghanistan was founded in 1747 and by 1750 direct Afghan rule was established approximately on the boundaries as we know them to-day. Only in the south and east, where at that time direct Afghan sovereignty extended to the Indus, have they altered in any major respect.

It would therefore I think be wise to turn aside at this point from the narrative of history to describe briefly the various races, which inhabit the country of the Hindu Kush and which, though they are not by any means all Afghans, are now included among the people of Afghanistan. By 1747 it becomes possible to do so. The great nomad migrations from the north-east have come to an end, and the only considerable influx of people subsequently to enter the country are members of the Turki-speaking tribes in the north who during the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 crossed the Afghan border in some numbers to join their compatriots already established south of the Oxus.

But to anyone who has studied the foregoing chapters of this narrative it is obvious that from earliest recorded times, and probably before them, the country henceforth to be called Afghanistan has been the meeting place of many peoples. Standing as it does on the high road between Eastern and Western Asia, and on the fringe of the Empires which rose and fell in Persia and India, it has been affected by the stream of migration from further Asia in the north, and by the ebb and flow of conquest from the west and south. Sheltered in the east by the great

mountain barrier of the Pamirs its remote valleys have held as it were in a backwater the remnants of forgotten races, whose ancestors have been gradually driven into their mountain fastnesses by the encroachments of more virile peoples.

The present races of Afghanistan seem likely therefore to contain in many cases diverse elements which in course of time have become absorbed into an older stock to form a more or less homogeneous type. The Indo-Aryan immigrants found Dravidians in possession, and perhaps as well some elements of an even older race. On them were super-imposed Greeks and Scythians, Kushans and Ephthalites, Mongols and Turks, to name a few of the many races which for a time have held possession of parts of the country. Some of these races have kept apart and retained most of their original characteristics. Others have merged into the general population and lost all traces of their remote origin. In time no doubt anthropological research will permit the formation of a more definite picture and a clearer understanding of the racial antecedents of the peoples of Afghanistan. For the present we must be content with a description founded on a superficial knowledge of their origins, and can do little more than endeavour to distinguish between fact and legend, using for this purpose the scanty information provided by such records as are available.

PATHANS OR TRUE AFGHANS

Chief among the peoples of Afghanistan are the Pathans or true Afghans, rulers of the country, and principal element in its diverse population. Popular tradition ascribes to them Jewish origin, the Beni Israel, descended through Qais from Saul, King of Israel. There is nothing save certain facial likenesses, a number of biblical names and some other minor characteristics to substantiate this story. On the other hand the Pathan language, Pushtu, bears no resemblance to Hebrew or other Aramaic languages.

Scientific analysis of their physical characteristics shows the Pathan to be, so far as one can tell at present, of the Turko-Iranian type with a considerable mixture of Indian blood among the eastern tribes. Comparison of measurement and of integumentary colour show that several racial strains have gone into the composition of the Pathan and neighbouring tribes. There

is first of all the underlying substratum of a tall dolichocephalic leptorrhine element with light skin, eye and hair colours in the Pathan of the frontier, the Red Kafirs, and in the Khalash of Rambur and Bamboret. It appears that the arrival of this race in the North-West Himalaya region was contemporaneous with the Aryan invasion of India.

The second racial strain which is also foreign to these parts is the brachycephalic race with the long and frequently aquiline nose, light complexion but medium hair and eyes, allied to the Dinaric race of Eastern Europe, which entered from the Hindu Kush or the Pamirs. Its intrusion must have taken place later, but seems to have affected the racial type of the north-western tribes as shown by the increase of cephalic index and the frequent occurrence of aquiline noses among them. It has been partially observed among the Red Kafirs and the northern Pathans, but the Khalash are free from its influence. This Dinaric race was probably dislodged from Russian Turkestan by the Mongol invasions.

Two more foreign racial strains are to be noticed. One is characterized by a long head, aquiline nose, rosy-white complexion, nut-brown eyes and hair. This is found in the Badakhshis of Badakhshan, and among the Pathans. There is also the Mongoloid element. There are also to be found traces of an autochthonous race, of short stature, dolichocephalic head, medium nose, broad face, and brown complexion.

This analysis, coupled with the fact that Pushtu, the language of the Pathans, belongs to the Aryan subdivision of the Indo-European group of languages, suggests the probability that the Pathans are of Aryan origin, but have intermingled with elements of Turkish, Mongol, and other strains which have at different times infiltrated into or through what is now the Indo-Afghan border.

The original habitat of the Pathan was the country lying round the Suleiman Range, on what is now the eastern border of Baluchistan. According to Raverty the Pathans derived their name from the fact that they were the people who lived behind or at the back of or between the ridges of the Suleiman Range, the word Pasht in Tajik Persian signifying the back of a mountain range. Hence came the word Pashtan, with its plural Pashtanah. From this was derived the hard Pakhtun of the northern Afghans,

and the general appellation Pathan. Raverty draws attention to the fact that this area of the Suleiman Range was also known as 'the Ghar' or mountainous country, and attributes to this the error into which many historians have fallen of placing the original habitat of the Afghan race in the country of Ghor, many miles to the west. The people of Ghor were Shansabhani Tajiks, and in no way connected with the original Pathans.¹

Apart from a reference in Herodotus to the Paktyes, as forming part of the thirteenth division of people subject to Darius the Great, which may or may not have referred to the Pathans, no reference to this name appears before the sixteenth century. The name Afghan, though of unknown origin, first appears in history in the *Hudud-al-Alam*, a work by an unknown Arab geographer who wrote c. A.D. 982.² In it the Afghans are mentioned as living at Saul, which is placed in the Birmul area of south-eastern Afghanistan, and possibly not far from the ancient city of Zabul, once the capital of Zabulistan. They are also mentioned as providing wives for the King of Ninhar, i.e. Jalalabad, who professed to be a Muslim though surrounded by Buddhist idolators.

Al Othbi, secretary to Mahmud of Ghazni, who wrote at the beginning of the eleventh century, mentions Afghans as forming part of the Ghaznavid armies. But they were still an obscure mountain race, who in 1039-40 had to be subdued by the Turkish rulers of Ghazni. There is at this time no record of their penetration to the west of Ghazni or into the Kabul River valley, which was still under the sway of Hindu Rajas.

In the ensuing period, i.e. during the period of the rise of Muhammadan power in northern India in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D., the Afghan penetrated into the Kabul area. The Moorish traveller Ibn Batuta, who passed through Kabul in 1333, found it inhabited 'by a tribe of Persians called Afghans' whose principal residence was the Koh-i-Suleiman. 'They hold mountains and defiles, possess considerable strength and are mostly highwaymen.' And so they have continued more or less up to recent historical times.

The characteristics of the modern Afghan are governed by his geographical and historical environment. At a time when a

¹ Major H. G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan*.

² *Hudud-al-Alam*, translated by Prof. V. Minorsky.



THE KHAWAK PASS

The upper picture shows an Afghan escort on the summit of the Pass

stream of culture from east and west was meeting in the great centres of literature and science in Samarqand and Herat, or at a later period when India was developing the culture and art which flourished under the Mogul Empire, the Afghans were an obscure and troublesome tribe of shepherds and highwaymen. It is true that dynasties of an origin which is sometimes called Afghan reigned for a period in Delhi. But with the possible exception of the Suri and Lodi dynasties the so-called Afghan Kings of Delhi were of Turkish origin, as also were the Ghilzais, who for a brief period reigned in Persia. The true Afghans had never been looked on as other than savage wild men of the hills by their neighbours until they suddenly emerged 200 years ago as sovereigns of a vast dominion.

But their first essays at sovereignty were not happy. Ahmad Shah was a conqueror and an administrative genius, but his successors were not gifted with his qualities and it seems doubtful whether the Afghan Kingdom would have long endured had it not become of political importance to the great western powers that it should do so. And so as a buffer state, a political no-man's-land, Afghanistan survived the nineteenth century. Cut off from all access to the civilizing influence of a seaboard, cajoled, bullied, and finally invaded by one powerful neighbour, while darkly suspicious, and with reason, of the designs of the other, the Afghans remained behind their hills, fierce and fanatical defenders of their liberty, until in 1919 they emerged to join the comity of nations.

THE GHILZAIS

In books of reference on Afghanistan the Ghilzais are usually cited as of 'true' Afghan race. It seems doubtful whether this is the case. The Ghilzais themselves generally accept the tradition that they are descended from Noah through Zohak, whose children fled from Persia to escape the tyranny of Faridan and settled in the country of Ghor, in the mountainous area of the Hari Rud. Here one of their descendants, Shah Hossain, had illicit connexion with the daughter of a chieftain of Ghor whom he afterwards married. She bore him a son who being the offspring of a clandestine love affair, was named Ghilzye : *Ghil* in the Afghan language signifying 'thief' and *zye* 'born, a son'. From Ghilzye were descended the present tribe of the Ghilzais.

This account, which was recorded (c. A.D. 1620) by Niamatullah, historiographer at the court of the Emperor Jahangir, appears to take its origin from the desire of the Ghilzais, a desire which is also to be found in other parts of the world, to attach their origin to some great historical or legendary name. It is of course possible that they were in some way connected with a princely house of Ghor.

But it seems more probable that the Ghilzais are of Turkish origin, and descended from the Khalaj tribe, a section of the great Khallakh (or Qarluq) confederacy of tribes who dwelt c. A.D. 900 to the south and west of Lake Isik K  l, north of the Tien Shan Mountains. Opinions on this question are conflicting. Among modern writers Bellew points to the names of the main subdivisions of the tribe, Turan and Buran, with the clans Tokhi and Hotak, Andar and Taraki, to support the thesis that the Ghilzai are of Turkish origin, descendants of the Khilich Turks who took refuge in Ghor, possibly about the eighth century A.D., and gradually spread into their present country between Ghazni and Qandahar. Raverty on the other hand refuses to admit the Turkish origin of the Ghilzais and describes them as being in A.D. 1220 a small tribe dwelling near the skirts of the great western range of the Mihtar Suleiman, the cradle of the Pushtuns, which they did not leave till some two centuries after this period. For this opinion Raverty relies on the *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, whose author passed through Ghazni in A.D. 1227.

It is never safe to differ from Raverty, nor is the similarity between the names Ghilzai and Khalaj, Khilij or Khilije a reliable basis on which to form an opinion. But my own knowledge of the Ghilzais coupled with the evidence noted below taken from tenth-century Arab geographers, whose writings were almost certainly unknown to Raverty, supports the theory that the Ghilzais are not Pathans, but are in fact descendants of the Turkish tribe of Khalaj.

The Khalaj tribe is described by Istakhri, who wrote c. A.D. 930, as 'a kind of Turk who in the days of old came to the country between Hind and the districts of Sijistan behind Ghor. They are cattle breeders of Turkish appearance, dress and language.' The author of the *Hudud-al-Alam*, who wrote c. A.D. 980 and probably had personal knowledge of the country of southern Afghanistan describes the Khalaj in the following terms :

In Ghazni and in the limits of the districts which we have enumerated [i.e. Kabul, Istakh, and Sakavand] live the Khalaj Turks who possess many sheep. They wander along climates [*gardanda bar hava*], grazing grounds and pasture lands. These Khalaj Turks are also numerous in the provinces [*hudud*] of Balkh, Turkanistan, Bust and Guzgan.

Lastly the *Jihan-nama* of Muhammad bin Najib Bakran, written c. A.D. 1200, contains the following :

The Khalaj are a tribe of Turks who from the Khallakh limits emigrated to Zabulistan. Among the districts of Ghazni there is a steppe where they reside. Then on account of the heat of the air their complexion has changed and tended towards blackness ; the language too has undergone alterations and become a different dialect.

This evidence so far as it goes is a strong, though perhaps not a conclusive basis, on which to identify the Ghilzais with the Khalaj. But the resemblance between the two tribes is impressive, and perhaps sufficient to warrant our attempting to reconstruct their history.

The Khalaj, a Turkish tribe, broke away from the Khallakh confederacy in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. and moved southwards across the Oxus. This move must have nearly coincided with the southward drive of the Ephthalites,¹ with whom the Khalaj or Khalach have by some authorities been identified. Whether this is so or not we find the Khalaj by the middle of the tenth century A.D. spreading across Afghanistan, round Ghor, in the Ghazni and Kabul areas, as well as in Balkh and Tukharistan. They were pre-eminently a nomad people who possessed cattle and many sheep, moved with the changes of climate, and sought the seasonal grazing grounds. One may conjecture that during this period and for the next 300 years they were gradually moving southwards, spreading over the country in search of grazing and urged on by the desire to escape the Arab invaders to the north and west. Some may have taken refuge in Ghor, others settled in the neighbourhood of Ghazni. Others again passed on into India, to found in A.D. 1288 the Khiljye dynasty of Delhi. It is by no means impossible to imagine that those who remained in the district of Ghazni, from which they would have to migrate annually in the cold season to

¹ See Pt. I, Ch. II.

India, assimilated the language and the colouring of the Pathans of the Suleiman Range, with whom they must have had close dealings, and are identical with the Ghilzais mentioned by Raverty. At any rate it is not easy to disagree with the comment in Volume III of the *Cambridge History of India*: 'If the Ghilzais be not Khaljis it is difficult to say what has become of the latter.'

The Ghilzais, under this name, first came into prominence during the seventeenth century, when Shah Abbas transferred a large section of the rival Abdali tribe from the Qandahar district to that of Herat because of their turbulent behaviour and misconduct. This removal of the Abdalis led to an increase in the power and influence of the Ghilzais in the neighbourhood of Qandahar: their power continued to grow as the century wore on, and towards its close they began to intrigue with the Mogul prince Shah Alam (afterwards Bahadur Shah), the Governor of Kabul. On this intrigue being discovered the Ghilzais were treated with great severity. Early in the eighteenth century they revolted, seized Qandahar and became virtually independent. There then followed their brief incursion into Persia, which we have already noticed.¹ By 1729 the Ghilzai chieftain Ashraf had been driven from Persia and the Ghilzais themselves lapsed into obscurity. In 1747 they were forced to submit to the rule of Ahmad Shah Durrani, first of the Sadozai rulers of Afghanistan. Since that date the Ghilzais have never played a decisive role in Afghanistan, though they have been a constant source of danger to the ruling house, and have resisted any attempt to bring them under effective control.

THE TAJIKS

The Tajiks are a non-nomad race of Persian origin. They are settled chiefly round Kabul, in Kohistan and the valley of the Panjshir River, and in the north-east beyond the Hindu Kush in the valleys of the upper Oxus. Large groups of them are also to be found round Bamiyan and in the Herat province. There are also groups or families of Tajiks in many of the large towns where they follow some trade as artisans or merchants.

Their origin and history is obscure. They may have been the original Iranian inhabitants of the country. The Chinese

¹ Pt. I, Ch. V.

envoy Chang-K'ien who visited the country of the Oxus in 128 B.C. describes the people of Bactria proper, whom he names the Ta-hia, in a fashion which recalls many characteristics of the Tajiks. The Ta-hia, who had been recently conquered by the Yue-chi, had fixed abodes (i.e. were not nomads), lived in walled towns and regular houses, and were shrewd traders but poor fighters. The resemblance is striking but there is no proof. Other accounts derive the name Tajik from the Arabic Taz or Taj which was the label attached to their mixed descendants by the Arabs who conquered most of southern Persia.

The Tajiks, though gradually conquered, continued to hold sway in the mountainous country of Ghor and provided the Ghorid dynasty of Delhi till it was overthrown by its Turkish viceroys at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The modern Tajiks, or Parziwans as they are called by the Afghans, are a peaceful industrious people of the small farmer class. They have a higher scale of intelligence than the average Afghan and when they leave their village for the towns usually manage to make a good livelihood in any profession or business they take up. They are shrewd business men, though avaricious, and are both industrious and frugal, but are somewhat wanting in honesty and independence owing to their position as a subject race.

THE TURKISH TRIBES

There has been an infiltration of Turkish tribes into Afghanistan from a very early date. The Yue-chi, who ruled over the greater part of Afghanistan at the beginning of the Christian era, are believed by some authorities to have been Turks, though they spoke a Scythian dialect. In the tenth century, as we have seen, Khalaj Turks were established in southern Afghanistan, while names like Jagdalak in the Kabul River valley testify to Turkish occupation in pre-Afghan times. Turkish tribes as such have disappeared from the country south of the Hindu Kush but there undoubtedly remains a Turkish element in the Pathan and other tribes of that area.

To the north of the Hindu Kush a very considerable proportion of the population is composed of tribes of Tatar or Turkish origin though now intermingled with foreign blood. Of these the most important and numerous are the Uzbeks, who are to be found all along the rolling plains of Afghan Turkestan from the Murghab

River on the west to Faizabad in the east. In the nineteenth century they formed some ten semi-independent Khanates which have gradually disappeared, as the Afghans extended control over the country between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus.

The Uzbegs are typically Tatar in appearance with broad good-natured faces, and of fairer complexion than the Afghans. They are farmers by trade and breed a fine type of Turkman horse, as well as the Karakul sheep from which comes the now famous Afghan lambskin. They are on the whole a peaceful industrious people.

Among the less important Turkish tribes are the Turkmen, who are to be found along the southern bank of the Oxus. On the upper reaches of the Oxus, in Wakhan, are the Khirghiz, also probably of Turkish origin, a nomad people who like the other Turkish tribes have close affinities with the tribes of Russian Turkestan.

There are also scattered and unimportant groups of Kazaks, Qarluq, and Chagatai Turks in northern Afghanistan, perhaps still representing offshoots of the great tribes of these names who at various times have passed across the stage of Central Asia.

The Turkish tribes of the Oxus Valley are Sunni Muhammadans. They speak a form of Turki, which bears some slight resemblance to modern Turkish, but is archaic and intermingled with Persian words.

THE MONGOL TRIBES

The Hazarahs are traditionally and probably correctly believed to be descendants of Mongol Tatar regiments or mings brought into the country by Chenghiz Khan or one of the later Mongol rulers as garrison troops. They do not appear to have brought wives with them, but intermarried with the aboriginal Barbars whom with few exceptions they ousted. The Turki word *ming* signifies a thousand and was transformed into the Persian equivalent *hazar* by the Tajik neighbours of the original Mongols. The Afghan Hazarahs now number about 550,000, of whom 110,000 are fighting men. They formerly had close connexion with Persia, where there is a colony of Hazarahs in the neighbourhood of Meshed, they profess the Shiah faith and speak a Persian patois intermingled with Tatar words. They are divided into

sections, each of which is prefixed with the word Dai, or ten, signifying their original military division. The Hazarahs inhabit an immense tract of central Afghanistan consisting of narrow valleys, rugged mountain masses, and turbulent rivers. Within its limits they carry on a comparatively peaceful pastoral existence, following the grazing from their rude winter quarters, *yurts* or *kishlaks*, to their summer camping grounds, *ailaks*, on the grassy uplands of Hazarajat. They cultivate only just sufficient crops for their own needs.

The Hazarahs differ radically from the Afghans, with whom they have been constantly at feud, and retain many of the traits of their Central Asian ancestors. They are honest, courageous, good-natured, and simple. They make excellent servants, first-rate soldiers, and cheerful labourers. In their own homes they are shepherds by trade and bring large numbers of sheep into the Kabul and other markets. In the winter, when their whole country is under snow, they employ themselves in spinning and weaving and working in cloth and leather, while many seek employment in southern Afghanistan or in India.

THE KAFIRS OR NURISTANIS

The origin of the Kafirs of Kafirstan, or Nuristan as it is now called, is lost in the mists of antiquity. In a recent book of reference they are referred to as Dravidian aborigines of the wild country in which they live. It will take much further research to prove whether this is the case or not, but such knowledge as we possess of their history and their characteristics suggests that they may have been of Indo-Aryan origin and the decadent remnants of a more civilized race.

According to their own traditions they are the descendants of a once powerful people who came from the west. But the legends of their origin are too vague and too intermingled with fantasy to warrant serious consideration. Stories connect them with Alexander, and there is a tale of a meeting between the Greeks of Alexander's army and a fair-skinned people who lived at a place called Nysa somewhere between the Kunar and the Indus. But these tales have no reliable basis. All that seems at all certain is that parts of modern Kafirstan formed a portion of the Greek satrapy of the Paropamisadae in the third and fourth centuries B.C., and that it was inhabited at that time by

a people called Kambojas, who were of mixed Indo-Iranian descent. In fact scholars are of the opinion that Kamboja and Kapisa, the native city adjoining the Greek capital, might be identical.

Now it seems probable that at this period the ancestors of the Kafirs inhabited an area of much greater extent than at present. They may in fact have been, as they themselves say, the ancient inhabitants of central Afghanistan who were gradually forced to retire into the hills in face of Muhammadan encroachment. It is therefore possible that the Kafirs and the Kambojas, who were apparently good friends of the Greeks, are the same people, the name Kamboja giving way to the word Kafir which is the common Muslim name for idolater, but being partly retained in the name of one of the principal tribes, the Kam or Kamtoz.

The Kafirs, under this name, are mentioned by the historians of Mahmud of Ghazni who entered the Darah-i-Nur in A.D. 1020. They are more specifically mentioned by their tribal names in the reign of Timur-i-Lang, who while on his way to India in A.D. 1398 turned aside to chastise them. They are the subject of occasional reference by historians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when various Muslim chieftains, including the son of the Sultan of Kashgar, led expeditions against them. During the Mogul period, the Kafirs were visited on several occasions by emissaries from the Emperors Akbar and Jahangir, but appear to have been on the whole unmolested, and in fact to have offered allegiance to Jahangir.

They do not appear again in history until 1839, when they sent a deputation to Sir William Macnaghten in Jalalabad and claimed relationship with the fair-skinned rulers who had come into their country. Unfortunately Macnaghten received them in a manner which did not please them and nothing more was heard of them during the sojourn of the British in Afghanistan.

In 1895, shortly before they were subdued and converted to Islam by Abdur Rahman, they were visited by Mr. (Sir George) Robertson, at that time agent at Gilgit. The following brief account of this strange people is taken from his official report.

The dominant races of Kafiristan are the Katirs, the Kam and the Wai. Dwelling with them are the Jazhis, Aroms and Presans, who

with the slave population are probably remains of an older aboriginal race. The Kafirs are a people of magnificent physique of its kind, lightly built and active with great powers of endurance. They have a great idea of personal dignity, and give the appearance of a people whom force of circumstances has caused to degenerate from something higher. Many of them have the heads of philosophers and statesmen, and are men of considerable mental power with well-bred Aryan features. Their love of decoration, their carving and their architecture all point to the time when they were higher in the scale of human development than they are at present. At the same time their ideas and all the associations of their history and their religion are simply bloodshed, assassination and blackmailing. And yet they are not and never could be savages. Their physical courage is great and they have considerable contempt for the Pathan tribes on their border with whom until their conversion to Islam they were at perpetual feud. Their tribal divisions are numerous, and each tribe differs from its neighbour in language, dress and manners and customs.

Their religion which is probably still practised in the remote valleys was a somewhat low form of idolatry with an admixture of fire and ancestor worship, gods and goddesses were numerous, the principal being Imra the Creator and Gish the war god. They have numerous festivals, and are fond of dancing and singing. A curious and unique feature are the wooden images, often mounted on horses, which they erect over the graves of their dead.

Women have no place in Kafir society save as beasts of burden and bearers of children. They are highly immoral and repulsively dirty. Marriage is a simple affair and consists in the purchase of a girl by a man who wants her for a price over which there is frequently much haggling. Polygamy is common.

These are the principal races which make up the eight million inhabitants of Afghanistan. There are in addition elements of many other races, some of them of great antiquity. We find for instance among the Hazarahs small communities of Barbarians who are of Dravidian stock and a remnant of the pre-Aryan peoples, and intermingled with the Tajiks are still some Safis, probably an aboriginal people, of fine physique with light complexion and eyes.

Of later entry are some small colonies of Arabs, planted in central Afghanistan by the first Islamic invaders, and a curious little pocket of Qizilbash or 'redhead' Persians, a term once commonly applied to the Persian soldiery of Central Asia owing to the colour of their head-dress. The Qizilbash of Afghanistan

are descendants of a *chandawal* or rearguard left behind in Kabul by Nadir Shah in 1738 to protect his line of communications.

It is out of this hotch-potch of races, languages, and religions that Afghan rulers since 1747 have endeavoured to fashion a homogeneous state.

Chapter II

THE EMPIRE OF AHMAD SHAH DURRANI, FIRST KING OF AFGHANISTAN, AND OF HIS SADOZAI SUCCESSORS

(1747-1818)

IN the foregoing chapter I have attempted to give a brief account of the diverse races, which were now destined to pass under the dominion of the Afghan leader and of his successors, so that for the first time in its history the country of the Hindu Kush came into the possession of rulers chosen from among its indigenous inhabitants. Of these the Afghans were the most important, and of the Afghans the Ghilzais and the Abdalis were the leading divisions. These two powerful clans had already taken advantage of the waning power of the Empires of Persia and India at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries to assume virtual independence. For a brief space their progress was checked by the rise of Nadir Shah ; his disappearance from the stage and the consequent confusion which is the inevitable accompaniment of the downfall of despotic rule gave the Afghans their chance. Among the Abdalis the leading sections were the Populzais and the Barakzais, of which the most important families were the descendants of Sado and Muhammad who in the previous century had found favour at the court of Shah Abbas the Great of Persia. The descendants of these two men, the Sadozais and the Muhammadzais, have been the principal actors in the Afghan drama during the past two hundred years.

The Sadozais were the first to assume power, and in Ahmad Shah the Afghans found a leader fully equal to the role which fate had called on him to play. His election as first King of the Afghans followed shortly after his arrival in Qandahar and was facilitated by the withdrawal in his favour of Hajji Jamal Khan, chief of the Muhammadzais. One of his first actions was to assume the

name of Dur-i-Durran, or 'Pearl of Pearls', whence the Abdali tribe became generally known as the Durrani. Fortified with this high-sounding name the new King set to work at once to consolidate and extend his kingdom. It is evident that in so doing he was guided partly by a desire to emulate the conquests of his late master Nadir Shah, and partly by the knowledge that the only way to win the respect and allegiance of the Afghan people was to lead them to war against their neighbours. In addition the omens were propitious. On the one side of him was the crumbling Empire of the Moguls, on the other the internecine strife which followed the death of Nadir Shah reduced Persia to impotence for many years. The situation presented an unlimited field for his ambitions, and fortune favoured him in bringing at the outset of his enterprise a treasure convoy, estimated to be worth more than a million pounds into Qandahar from the Panjab. Thus equipped he took the first step towards the conquest of India by seizing Kabul, whose Turkish garrison of Qizilbashis placed there by Nadir Shah offered little resistance. Once again a great conqueror and leader of men was established in the Kabul River valley. Behind him was the protection of the Hindu Kush and in front the tottering throne of Muhammad Shah, last of the Moguls to retain any vestige of power. Once again though for only a brief space the familiar story of invasion, conquest, and domination of northern India was to be repeated. For a moment in 1748 a last flicker of determination from the imperial army of the Moguls sent Ahmad Shah in full retreat back across the Indus. In the following year, however, a renewed advance by the Afghan leader met with little resistance from Muhammad Shah's successor, who saved his capital only by the surrender to the Afghan of the areas of northern India previously ceded to Nadir Shah, namely all the trans-Indus territories and in addition the province of Sind.

Ahmad Shah's next move was to extend Afghan dominion over the areas north and north-west of the Hindu Kush. Herat fell to him after a siege of fourteen months, but his first attempt to push his conquests into Khurasan proved unsuccessful. At his second attempt, however, the inhabitants of Nishapur were terrified into submission by the discharge of a mighty projectile weighing 500 lb. from an Afghan cannon, which burst at the first shot but accomplished its purpose. Terms of peace were then

concluded between the Afghans and Shah Rukh, a grandson of Nadir Shah and nominal ruler of Khurasan, under which Shah Rukh remained in possession but acknowledged Afghan suzerainty. Ahmad Shah then set about the reorganization of the province of Herat, and at the same time sent an expedition to seize the Cis-Oxus territories from Maimana to Badakhshan and the mountain tract round Bamiyan. By the year 1750 Ahmad Shah had assumed direct control of the mountains and all the country of the Hindu Kush lying between the Indus and Oxus Rivers. In the north and west the boundaries of Afghanistan lay along approximately the same lines as to-day. In the south and east they extended over the country of the Pathans as far as the Indus and included the present Pakistan provinces of Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier. Beyond these boundaries Afghan rule and suzerainty continued for a few years to expand. In 1756 Ahmad Shah occupied Delhi and followed the example of his predecessors in carrying off from it as much loot as possible, while at the same time he constituted a province of his dominions east of the Indus which he entrusted to the care of his son, Timur Shah.

But by this time Afghan sovereignty in northern India was being challenged by the might of the Mahratta Confederacy, which in 1758 succeeded in driving Timur Shah across the Indus. A year later Ahmad Shah, who had been engaged with a rebel chieftain in Baluchistan, took the field against the Peshwa's armies. Driving the Mahrattas in front of him he reached Lahore, where, reinforced by Afghan contingents from India, he defeated Mulhar Rao Holkar of Indore. He then moved on Delhi. Meanwhile the Peshwa, seriously alarmed, sent north a great army under Sadashir Bhao, which as it advanced was joined by the contingents of numerous Hindu chieftains. The two armies met on the historic field of Panipat some thirty miles north of Delhi, where on 14 January 1761 was fought one of the decisive battles of the world, the issue being then as it is to-day whether Hindu or Muslim should dominate northern India.

Different accounts are given of this battle and of the numbers engaged. It seems probable that from 80,000 to 100,000 men took the field on each side, and that the Mahrattas, forsaking their usual harassing tactics, awaited the Afghans in a huge entrenched camp. The outcome remained in doubt until in the afternoon the Peshwa's son was killed, whereupon the Mahratta lines gave

way. The Bhao in a last desperate charge died fighting amid a horde of Afghans, and a terrible scene of carnage ensued as the defeated Mahrattas fled from the field. Never was a defeat more complete; in the words of a Hindu banker: 'Two pearls have been dissolved, twenty-seven gold mohurs have been lost and of the silver and copper the total cannot be cast up.' Never again did the Mahrattas threaten northern India, and though they regained something of their former spirit, the defeat of Panipat undoubtedly shook the prestige of the Peshwas in the Deccan and paved the way for British expansion at a later date.

At this moment and for a few years afterwards the Empire of the Durrani Afghans reached its greatest extent. In 1762 Ahmad Shah defeated the Sikh army near Lahore, and by the annexation of Kashmir held dominion over an area which stretched from the Atrek River to Delhi and from the borders of Tibet to the Indian Ocean. But it was a short-lived Empire. Already in Ahmad Shah's lifetime signs were apparent that it was not possible to retain hold of northern India from a base in Qandahar. In an attempt to arrange a settlement of the Panjab Ahmad Shah recognized in 1742 the Mogul Prince Shah Alam II as Emperor at Delhi, while in 1767 he gave up the central Panjab to the Sikhs, retaining under his own control Peshawar and the northern Panjab.

This retreat from the high-water mark of success attained in 1761 was in part due to the terrible illness, a cancer of the face, from which the King suffered and which in the latter years of his life caused him to entrust the reins of government to his second son, Timur Shah, while he himself retired to a fortress in the Suleiman Mountains. Here he died in 1773.

Ahmad Shah Durrani has never been given a place among the great conquerors, and while such names as Timur-i-Lang, Mahmud of Ghazni, or Babur are familiar, few people could name the first King of the Afghans or describe his exploits. And yet Ahmad Shah Durrani was not only a great leader but possessed many other attributes of greatness. His arrival on the scene when both the Persian and Indian Empires were largely impotent was opportune, but it required genius to seize this fortune and to weld so intractable a people as the Afghans into the semblance of a nation. In so doing he showed himself to be the first of those born administrators who have on occasions in the course

of Afghan history emerged from obscurity to pilot their people through the dangerous shoals of Central Asian politics, and to whom the Afghan nation owes its political survival. He appears to have been a man of temperate habits, a firm but just ruler, and possessed of that excellent gift of understanding and common-sense which enabled him to unite and control the diverse factions of the Afghan people. He had the wisdom to rule through a Council of nine principal Sirdars who were each responsible for his own section of the people and whom he consulted on all major matters of state. In so doing he carried his people with him and ruled rather as first among his equals than as an autocrat.

But such genius is rare among the Afghans as among other races. Nor had the Afghan people as a whole acquired that stability of purpose which would have enabled them to consolidate control of the vast dominions acquired by Ahmad Shah, or to found an enduring dynasty to replace the dying empire of the Moguls. Such a task was too great for a people who were still largely tribal, resembling in their composition rather the clans of the highlands of Scotland in ancient days, owing allegiance to local chieftains rather than to the State or to the office of the sovereign ruler, and possessing no true national cohesion.

A nation in its earliest stages of development exhibits many manifestations of internal instability. Of these none is more common or more disastrous than the jealousies and feuds between rival claimants to the throne. Such feuds were so numerous and prolonged among the Sadozai rulers who followed Ahmad Shah as to lead to the breakup of the Durrani Empire, the downfall of the ruling house, and very nearly to the total dismemberment of Afghanistan, all in the short space of five and forty years.

The first signs of this tragic denouement were apparent immediately after Ahmad Shah's death, when his second son and heir, Timur Shah, was forced in the opening months of his reign to meet the challenge of his brother Sulaiman Mirza, who had been proclaimed King in Qandahar. The rebellion was quickly overcome and Sulaiman fled to India, while Timur, disgusted at the attitude of the people of Qandahar, transferred his capital to Kabul. There he undertook the reorganization of his government, and in so doing showed that he lacked the administrative intuition of his father. While he confirmed Painda Khan, son

of Hajji Jamal Khan, as head of the powerful Muhammadzai section of the Durranis, he sought his principal advisers from among his personal adherents, and raised a bodyguard of 12,000 Qizilbash¹ cavalry as likely to be more trustworthy than his Afghan subjects. These were major errors, since there is no surer way to breed distrust among a backward and suspicious people than to ignore their leaders and cast doubts on their loyalty and good faith. It is true that Timur's reign was on the whole uneventful, but his attempts to break away from the guidance of the principal chiefs led up to the internal dissensions which followed his death, while his peaceable disposition gave scope to the outlying provinces of his dominions to throw off their allegiance. In 1779 a revolt in Sind ended in his acceptance of terms, which were never carried out, and of a subordinate ruler who in three years became practically independent. A similar result followed a rebellion in the northern Afghan provinces instigated by the ruler of Bukhara. In 1791 a conspiracy against Timur's life was hatched in Peshawar and nearly succeeded. Its failure led to the killing of most of the conspirators on the spot, and to the treacherous capture and murder of the leader, the chief of the Mohmand clan. The odium attaching to this cold-blooded violation of his oath affected the closing years of Timur's life which ended, possibly from poison, in 1793.

At Timur's death the Durrani Empire, though weakened, still included the following areas: Kashmir, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, all Afghanistan south of the Hindu Kush, Herat on the west, and the provinces of Balkh and Khulm in the Oxus Valley. The Afghan ruler still therefore controlled the Hindu Kush and much of northern India while his suzerainty was acknowledged by Kalat, Baluchistan, and Persian Khurasan.

We may also include Sind among his dependencies, although the ruler, Mir Fath Khan, chief of the Talpuras, had paid no tribute for five years.

Of his neighbours, the Sikhs in the Panjab, where British power had not yet been felt, were still subordinate to Afghan influence. In the west Agha Muhammad Khan, founder of the Qajar dynasty of Persia, was establishing his power but had not yet renewed Persian pretensions to Khurasan and Herat. In the north the Uzbeg, Beghi Khan, ruled in Bukhara.

¹ Qizilbash: see Pt. II, Ch. I.

The Afghans still therefore possessed an empire which, from its base in Kabul, could have held its own with surrounding countries, dominated northern India, and in the hands of a stable government might well have endured. But nothing could have been more unstable than the succession of Princes who for the next quarter of a century fought and bickered and intrigued for the Afghan throne while their Empire fell to pieces around them.

Timur left thirty-six children of whom twenty-three were sons, but failed to nominate an heir. Such a combination of circumstances favoured whoever happened on Timur's death to be left in *de facto* possession of the capital,¹ and of its considerable resources and strategically important situation. This was Zaman Shah, fifth son of Timur, who also had the powerful backing of Pinda Khan, chief of the Muhammadzais. When, therefore, the sons of Timur with two exceptions flocked to Kabul to elect a new ruler they found themselves imprisoned and starved into unwilling acquiescence in the selection of Zaman Shah. It was an unpropitious start to a stormy reign. Zaman Shah had hardly assumed control of the government when his brother Humayun moved against him from Qandahar. After disposing of Humayun, Zaman Shah turned south to chastise the Mir of Sind, only to learn that another brother, Mahmud, was advancing against him from Herat. He hastily compounded with Mir Fath Khan of Talpura for arrears of tribute and turned back to deal with Mahmud, who fled to Persia leaving Herat in Zaman Shah's hands. But hardly were the affairs of Herat settled than the Sikhs rose against their Afghan overlords and seized Lahore. And so the sordid and confused story of weakness, treachery, and intrigue goes on ; we need hardly follow it through all its intricacies, nor indeed is it easy to pick out the truth among the many confused versions presented by contemporary writers. We may, however, note a few salient points and the emergence of one or two notable characters who were afterwards to play a major part in the affairs of Afghanistan and northern India.

Zaman Shah's rule came to an abrupt end in 1800, when he was defeated and blinded by his brother Mahmud, and took refuge finally in India. Mahmud, who was not only indolent but also incapable, ruled for a bare three years. He was ousted in 1803 by Shah Shuja, who was afterwards to play so prominent

¹ Cf. the case of Amanullah : Pt. II, Ch. XI (1).

a part in the First Afghan War. But Shah Shuja was no more fortunate than his predecessors in his first attempt to govern the Durrani Empire, and in 1809 had to give way in his turn to Mahmud, whose second attempt to rule this most turbulent kingdom brought about the downfall of the Sadozai family in 1818.

Throughout this unhappy story we find the same characteristics which in Timur Shah's lifetime had already weakened the ruler's hold on the loyalty of his people. There is in the Afghan temperament a certain arrogance of disposition which, when added as it sometimes is to a pronounced weakness of character, produces the same combination which in our own history was so fatal to the Stuarts. None of the sons of Timur Shah was prepared to conciliate the great chiefs and to rule as *primus inter pares*. Instead Zaman Shah deliberately ignored them, and took as his chief adviser an obscure and corrupt Populzai, called Vafadar Khan. When the tribal chiefs plotted to overthrow this man, Zaman Shah with inconceivable folly had them all executed in his presence including Painda Khan, head of the Muhammadzais. Painda Khan's eldest son, Fath Khan, managed to escape to Persia, where he instigated Shah Mahmud to rise against his brother Zaman Shah, and secure the throne. So long as the Sadozais reposed confidence in Fath Khan, now the most influential chief in Afghanistan, and followed his advice, their tenure of the throne was reasonably secure. But these decadent princelings and their unscrupulous advisers could not follow such a policy for long. In 1818 Shah Mahmud seized Fath Khan, who was then his chief adviser, and under some flimsy pretext urged on him by his son had his eyes put out. The immediate outcome of this dastardly and supremely foolish act was a revolt by the powerful Muhammadzai brothers against the Sadozais, who were forced to abandon Kabul and after murdering Fath Khan in Ghazni to take refuge in Herat.

Thus ended in inglorious confusion the brief Empire of Ahmad Shah. A student of the period is liable to derive the impression that these early Durrani were a collection of incompetent savages, among whom only Ahmad Shah stood out as a leader of men. I do not think that this is an entirely fair description of them, though it is one which has been widely held in the past. But Mountstuart Elphinstone, who was the first of the British to have official dealings with the Afghans when he visited Shah Shuja's

court in Peshawar in 1808, leaves a not unfavourable description of his reception and of the King's demeanour and appearance. Elphinstone was the first but by no means the last observer to record of an Afghan monarch 'how much he had the manners of a gentleman, or how well he preserved his dignity while he seemed only anxious to please'.¹ But dignity and good manners are only part of a ruler's equipment. Common sense, patience, tolerance, and a broad grasp of essentials are qualities with which no ruler can afford to dispense.

¹ Mountstuart Elphinstone, *Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*.

Chapter III

THE RISE OF THE MUHAMMADZAIS, DOST MUHAMMAD

(1818-1838)

THE downfall of the ruling house in 1818 was not followed immediately by the establishment in Kabul of the Muhammadzai family. The disappearance of Fath Khan left them for a period without a leader, since his next brother, Muhammad Azim, who was endeavouring to restore order in Kabul, had neither the force of character nor the power to unite under his leadership so fierce and lawless a people. For eight years confusion reigned supreme while one puppet after another tried his fortune on the throne of the Durranis. It was not till 1826, some years after the death of Muhammad Azim, that Dost Muhammad, youngest of the sons of Painda Khan, finally asserted his ascendancy over his remaining brothers and assumed control of the remnants of Ahmad Shah's Empire.

There was indeed little left. During the years of anarchy and of internecine strife, which had continued for upwards of a quarter of a century, one province after another had broken away from the central authority. In the north Balkh had asserted its independence, Sind and Baluchistan did the same in the south. In the west the refugee Sadozais, Shah Mahmud and his son Kamran, had established themselves in Herat, while Por Dil with others of the Muhammadzai brothers, later known as the Qandahar Sardars, held the southern country from the Persian border nearly to Ghazni.

But more immediately dangerous to the future integrity of the Afghan Kingdom was the rising power of the Sikhs in northern India. We have seen how Ahmad Shah had been obliged in the latter years of his reign to resign control of the central Panjab to the Sikh Federation. Some twenty years later an outbreak in Lahore, during which the Sikhs killed the Afghan representative, compelled Zaman Shah to re-establish his authority in the northern Panjab in person. He accomplished this task without

much difficulty and for a short time is said to have contemplated moving his capital to Lahore. Such a move would have conformed to previous pattern and might well have altered the course of Indian history. But he was overruled by his principal sardars, who refused to abandon their Afghan homes. He returned to Kabul after having agreed to the request of those Sikh chiefs who had not revolted against him to choose as Governor in future a Sikh in preference to an Afghan. His choice fell on Ranjit Singh, a young chieftain of great promise and ambition, under whose guidance the Sikh nation soon developed into the most formidable fighting machine in northern India.

Ranjit Singh took advantage of the growing weakness of the Sadozais to extend his dominion, until by 1818 he held all the northern Panjab between the Indus and the Sutlej and was casting covetous eyes on Peshawar and Kashmir, where two of the Muhammadzai brothers, Sultan Muhammad and Jabbar Khan, exercised precarious authority. A year or two later encroachments by the Sikhs on the right bank of the Indus led to a clash in which the uncertain leadership of the Afghans proved to be no match for the military skill of the Sikh leaders. As a result Ranjit Singh, who had previously obtained possession of Kashmir, Multan, and the Derajat, now controlled the entire Peshawar Valley. While retaining his rights as suzerain of the country to the east of the Khyber Pass, he entrusted the governorship of Peshawar to Sultan Muhammad Khan on the payment of a small tribute.

Such was the position when Dost Muhammad Khan took his seat on Ahmad Shah's throne as ruler of an area whose limits stretched less than a hundred miles from Kabul in any direction. Seldom can an empire have disintegrated quite so rapidly or a dynasty shown itself less capable of unity and sustained effort.

The family of the Muhammadzais who now assumed control of Afghan destinies were of a somewhat different calibre from the Sadozais. It is true that its members have not always maintained good relations among themselves, and on more than one occasion fraternal jealousies and hostility have gone nigh to wrecking their kingdom. But unlike the Sadozais they have been able to produce a succession of able rulers to keep the country together, the moment has hitherto always produced the man, and now 120 years after Dost Muhammad took over the reins of government

the Muhammadzais are still firmly established as rulers of Afghanistan.

Dost Muhammad himself was brought up in a hard school of intrigue and plotting and treachery. Youngest of the sons of Painda Khan by a Qizilbash mother, he found his brothers reluctant to accept his leadership, though once he had won his position he found the support of the powerful Qizilbash faction in Kabul of much value to him. In his youth he had been little more than a servant to his elder brother, Fath Khan, and while he learnt the arts of war at an early age and became a fine leader of cavalry he learnt nothing of the arts of peace, and when he gained control of Kabul could neither read nor write. Nor was he in these early days less disposed to treachery and deceit than the necessities of the times and the character of his rivals dictated.

But once established in Kabul he showed, as others of his family have done, that he possessed not only the abilities of a military leader, but also some of the genius of a born administrator. The territories which now fell under his sway were circumscribed and barren. It would not have been difficult for him to have added to them by encroaching on the possessions of his brothers, and acquiring the rich lands of Jalalabad or the prosperous city of Qandahar. He preferred, however, to consolidate his own position, to rule his people with impartiality and justice according to Muhammadan law, and, while educating himself, to bring his subjects and particularly the tribal sardars to realize that their primary duty was to obey their ruler. His task was by no means easy, and for some years after he obtained control the lawlessness of many of his subjects made life in or travel through Afghanistan an uncertain and hazardous business. But improvement was marked if slow; by 1832 trade under his encouragement had revived and merchants were able to move with some freedom throughout the kingdom.

The account given by the traveller, Charles Masson, of his life and journeyings in Afghanistan during this period illustrates the condition of the country. His narrative relates to the years immediately preceding the First Afghan War when a 'feringhi' (foreigner), though an object of curiosity, was not regarded as yet with hatred and suspicion. Masson found the country still torn by dissensions and vexed by the rumour and report of war, with no very stable authority to maintain law and order or from

whom to seek orders, when on occasions he and his fellow travellers were waylaid and robbed by some of the many highway-men who infested the roads. At the same time he could as a rule travel without let or hindrance wherever he wished ; his life, if not his purse, was secure, and he found almost universal hospitality and goodwill among his Afghan hosts. The country too was not un-prosperous, the bazars were thronged and there was abundance of food, particularly of the fruits for which Afghanistan is famous. Conditions in fact seemed to differ very little from those obtaining ninety years later when I went first to Kabul. Only in 1832 it was the Sikhs on the south-eastern frontier who were the chief preoccupation of the Afghan ruler, in 1922 it was the British. And on the whole in 1922 the roads were safer for the traveller, though it was more risky for a 'feringhi' to venture far from the beaten track than it had been in 1832.

It is interesting to speculate how the situation in the country of the Hindu Kush and northern India might have developed had the various Asiatic powers been left to fulfil their destinies undisturbed by European influences. It seems unlikely that Dost Muhammad, with Persia consolidated under the Qajar dynasty on one side of him and the Sikhs led by Ranjit Singh on the other, could have emulated the exploits of Ahmad Shah. At the same time the Afghans having once secured their liberty would never have submitted again to foreign domination without a desperate struggle. Nor would they have long permitted any region, which had formed part of the dominion directly administered by Ahmad Shah and inhabited by people of Sunni Muslim faith and Pathan nationality, to remain in the hands of rulers of a different religion and race, and particularly in the hands of Hindus, without making every possible effort to regain it. While, therefore, the policy of Dost Muhammad as successor to the Sadozais was to resume control of Qandahar and Herat and of the territories between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus at the earliest opportunity, the recovery from the Sikhs of Peshawar and the territories west of the Indus was a matter of the first importance, involving as it did the liberation of his fellow countrymen from the Hindu yoke, and his own prestige and honour as a would-be champion of Islam.

By the time, however, that Dost Muhammad found himself in

a position to move against the Sikhs, Ranjit Singh had occupied Peshawar in person and was advancing beyond it. This encroachment into territory directly dependent on Kabul was the signal for immediate action by Dost Muhammad. In a hard-fought action near Jamrud the Dost's son, Muhammad Akbar, defeated the Sikhs, whose leader, Hari Singh, Ranjit's leading general, was killed. The Amir might have followed up this victory by the reoccupation of Peshawar. He deemed it more advisable, however, to seek the intervention of Lord Auckland, newly arrived Governor-General of India, in settling the differences between himself and the Sikh ruler. Accordingly in the spring of 1836 Dost Muhammad wrote to Lord Auckland congratulating him on his assumption of office, and asking his advice on how to deal with the Sikhs. This letter opened the door to British intervention in Central Asia.

Chapter IV

THE 'GREAT GAME' IN CENTRAL ASIA—THE OPENING GAMBIT

THE story of the rise and expansion of British power in India has been described in fullest detail and in many standard works. It is not my purpose to repeat it here or to do more than draw attention to the underlying and primary impulses which governed the gradual assumption by the British of control over the vast areas of the Indian sub-continent.

Many causes have been assigned to this expansion. Imperialistic acquisitiveness, the urge to dominate, the repercussions of strife in Europe, the greed of great trading companies hungry for dividends, the policies of ambitious men scarcely restrained by authority whose control was rendered nugatory by distance ; to all these factors has been ascribed the responsibility for the British domination of India. We may agree that all of them played some part in the drama which began with the foundation of the East India Company in 1599, and ended with the establishment of the two Dominions of India and Pakistan in 1947. But there were impulses and influences more vital than these which dominated and directed the growth of imperial expansion, influences which unperceived at the time emerge now in the light of history as giving sequence and unity to the whole pattern, and a certain inevitableness to what might otherwise appear as a vast undirected adventure.

We find the first of these influences at a very early stage. In 1688 the President and Council of Surat reported : ' There are many eminent persons that have declared themselves very desirous to live among us with their families, might they be secure. . . .'¹ While in the first seven years of the Company's rule the population of Bombay rose sixfold ; ' eloquent testimony to the security which the harassed people of this seaboard, where Mogul and Mahratta were in the first stages of their long warfare, discerned within its borders '.²

¹ Foster, *English Factories in India 1668-69*.

² Thompson and Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 41.

British traders first touched the shores of India and established their trading settlement at Surat in 1612 when the Mogul Empire was at its zenith. By the end of the century the over-centralization and bigotry of Aurangzeb, fifth of the Mogul Emperors, was undermining the fabric of the state, which rapidly fell to pieces in the hands of his weak successors. The Moguls continued for a century and a half to occupy the throne at Delhi, but the Mogul Empire was dissolving into its component parts. In such circumstances historical precedent pointed to the irruption of a fresh wave of conquerors from the north, either immediately or after a period of anarchy and misrule. In fact two such waves were forthcoming. The first under Nadir Shah partook, as we have seen, more of the nature of a raid on a heroic scale. It might have been followed by more permanent conquest had not assassination removed Nadir Shah; it was followed by an Afghan attempt to emulate the great conquerors of the past. But the Afghans were better fighters than administrators. They defeated in 1761 with fearful carnage what was at the moment probably the most powerful fighting force in India, the Mahratta Confederacy, but they could not consolidate their gains in northern India in the face of Sikh resistance. The Afghans in fact had not reached to the stature of a conquering race; they were still nomads, freebooters, and tribesmen capable of great action but lacking in continuity of purpose and sustained endeavour.

Meanwhile the British were absorbing territory and acquiring power as the one really stable factor in all southern and central India. But it was not till the close of the eighteenth century that their influence spread definitely into northern India and first impinged on Central Asia. While many reasons may be assigned to each of the several steps of this northward expansion, we can if we view the movement as a whole discern in it the second of the great influences, which direct all stable rulers whose boundaries are contiguous with unstable neighbours. The civilized must, for the sake of their own preservation, overrun and absorb into their dominion the uncivilized on their borders, for if they do not do so they will themselves be overwhelmed. We shall revert later in this book to a remarkable example of this proposition,¹ which when we handed over control of India

¹ Pt. II, Ch. X.

had not been resolved one way or the other. But the problem of the present north-western frontier of India is an exception to the general rule, due to a variety of extraneous causes, and does not affect the principle.

Apart from this one instance the British in India followed the common pattern. In 1792 their farthest expansion northward was Bengal, while outside Bengal their possessions were few and isolated. By the end of the century they had added to British India the whole of what is now the Madras Presidency while the 'north-western territories' stretched into the southern Panjab. Twenty years later the final defeat of the Mahrattas added the Bombay Presidency to their dominions and suzerainty over the Mahratta chieftains and the Rajputs. So they moved steadily forward across the great plains of India, and as they moved they reached out beyond their boundaries, seeking to safeguard the territories they had conquered by probing into the secrets and the policies of those which lay ahead.

It was at the end of the eighteenth century that the British, pushing northwards till their frontiers lay along the Sutlej River, first entered the territories which for a brief space had formed part of the Durrani Empire of Ahmad Shah. It is true that in the southern Panjab Durrani rule had by this time given place to the Sikhs. But while little was known of Afghan internal affairs or of the disintegration which was soon to reduce the Afghan rulers to impotence, the echoes of Ahmad Shah's last great invasion of India less than forty years before still sounded in men's ears and the possibility of further inroads on a similar scale were fresh in men's minds. The first impression therefore which the Afghans made on the British rulers of India was of a menace, shadowy but none the less formidable, to the peace and security of their north-western territories. It followed that when in 1798 Marquess Wellesley received a letter from Zaman Shah informing him of a proposed expedition into northern India and inviting his help in driving the Mahrattas out of central India, the British Governor-General took fright. He was at the time fully occupied with Hyderabad and Mysore in southern India, and with the Mahrattas in the centre. The introduction on such a scene of wild Afghan hordes pouring down from their mountain fastnesses and spreading devastation far and wide would have added to the complications of the

Governor-General's many problems. He might well have had to seek before long for deliverance from his friends.

In order therefore to forestall any such move on the part of the Afghan ruler Lord Wellesley approached the Persian Government through the East India Company's agent, requesting them 'to take measures to keep Zaman Shah in perpetual check so as to preclude him from returning to India, but without any decided act of hostility'.

Three years later we find the Government of India renewing their approaches to Persia for assistance in guarding their north-western approaches, but this time the danger came not only from the Afghans but also from the French. It may seem to us almost incredible that the British Government should have ever seriously contemplated an overland expedition by French armies against India, but at the beginning of the nineteenth century the power of Napoleon was at its zenith, and the possibility of his moving against India through Persia seemed to British statesmen of that time to be no more fantastic than did a similar expedition by German mechanized forces appear to British leaders in 1941. To counteract such designs the co-operation of Persia was as essential in 1801 as it afterwards was in 1941, and a treaty was signed with Fath Ali Shah of Persia whereby not only the Afghans but also the French were to be prevented from attacking India. So far as the Afghans were concerned the Shah undertook, if ever they attempted to invade India, 'to lay waste and desolate the Afghan dominions', and to employ every exertion 'to ruin and humble the above-mentioned nation'. The British Government agreed for their part to furnish the Persian army with war-like stores.

It is strange to look back on such a treaty and to realize that, had its conditions ever been literally fulfilled, the Persians would have had to fight on two fronts, while the British would have acquiesced in, and indeed aided, their domination of the north-western approaches to India. As matters turned out, however, the tide of French conquest never reached the shores of Asia, while the Afghans in the next few years managed most successfully 'to ruin and humble' themselves without requiring any external assistance whatsoever in the process. It is also interesting to note that at this time and for long afterwards the British had no conception of the strategic problems which were immedi-

ately confronting them in their advance to the north-west. They treated the Persians as friends and allies because they happened to know them, and they looked on the Afghans as potential enemies because they did not know them, and because they were possible rivals for the hegemony of northern India. The strategic connexion of Afghanistan with the security of India had not yet crossed the horizon of their consciousness.

It was not long, however, before changes on the political stage in Europe caused a reorientation of British policy in the Middle East. The peace of Tilsit (1807) brought the Tsar Alexander and Napoleon together to concert measures for a joint invasion of India through Persia, where French influence was now predominant. The British Government took immediate if rather confused steps to re-establish their position in Tehran, while at the same time Elphinstone and Metcalfe were sent to the Afghan and Sikh Courts to arrange defensive alliances against France and Russia. So far as the Afghans were concerned the disintegration of the Durrani Empire, as we have already noted, rendered any alliance with the Sadozais of little value. Shah Shuja, with whom the British envoy, Mountstuart Elphinstone, concluded a treaty, lost his throne a few weeks later, and the only concrete result of the mission was Elphinstone's admirable *Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*, the first and for many years the best description of the Afghans to be compiled by an Englishman.

For the next twenty years the unhappy condition into which the Durrani Empire had fallen rendered the Afghans powerless for good or evil in the affairs of Central Asia. It was fortunate indeed that, with the British still fully occupied with the affairs of internal India and largely ignorant of the political geography of the country beyond their north-western borders, there was in the early years of the nineteenth century no 'race of conquerors' pressing down across the Oxus Valley and on to the ridges of the Hindu Kush. But by this time the Uzbegs seem to have shot their bolt. We last heard of them in the middle of the seventeenth century when they forced the Mogul armies to quit the Oxus Valley.¹ They appear to have advanced no farther and to have fallen easy victims to the armies sent against them by the Persians and Durrani leaders early in the eighteenth century. The modern Uzbegs, good farmers and pleasant peaceful people,

¹ Pt. I, Ch. V.

give an impression of a race lacking something of the spirit of leadership and conquest which animated their predecessors in Central Asia, and without which they could hardly hold out for long against pressure from the west or the next great wave of conquest from the north.

But in the first half of the nineteenth century this wave had not begun to move from its boundaries far off beyond the Aral Sea. And so it was that when in the early 1800s the Afghan débâcle left the vital bastions of India's north-western defences, Qandahar, Herat, and the Hindu Kush, practically unguarded, there was no power on either side in a position to fill the vacuum and seize the gateways to India.

But the Russian menace to India, if still far off, was developing in a manner calculated to disturb the British rulers of India. It came at first not from the north but from the Caucasus, where Russian pressure on Persia in the early years of the century brought the two nations into armed conflict. The Persians, terrified at the shadow of the great Russian Bear on their northern borders, turned first to France and then after the peace of Tilsit to Britain for help. The British, preoccupied with affairs in India, did not at first respond to Persian overtures. It was not in fact till 1814 that an Anglo-Persian treaty was signed pledging the British to come to the assistance of the Persians if the latter were attacked by any European power, either by sending an armed force or by the payment of an annual subsidy of 200,000 tomans. But by the time this treaty was concluded the Russians had completed their first forward move. By 1813 the Persians, having suffered one defeat after another, were forced to agree to the terms laid down in the treaty of Gulistan. This treaty confirmed the Russians in the possession of Georgia and most of the Caucasus, and deprived the Persians of the right to maintain ships of war on the Caspian Sea. This prohibition, which was not revoked until 1921, proved a useful safeguard for the subsequent development of Russian policy against the Turkmen.

And so in the opening year of the nineteenth century began from far off the great strategic moves of the two European powers dominant in Asia, which before its close were to bring them face to face along a line stretching from the Chinese frontier amid the glaciers of the Sarikol Range, all down the Oxus from its sources in Lake Victoria, across the sands of the Kara Bel plateau to

the valley of the Hari Rud and the frontiers of Persia. Their progress involved the disappearance of many hitherto independent principalities and states, and affected the fortunes of others. The Khirghiz and the Turkmen were subdued by Russia while Khiva and Bukhara acknowledged her suzerainty. In India the Panjab and Sind became British provinces, Kalat, Kashmir, and Chitral accepted British paramountcy, while the long arm of Britain stretched out across Afghanistan to guard the approaches to India. The Russian drive to the south was looked on with fear and suspicion by British statesmen who saw in it an actual or potential threat to India, and lost no opportunity of contrasting British and Russian policy to the detriment of the latter.¹ The British advance northward, and particularly the two invasions of Afghanistan, were regarded in St. Petersburg as an attempt by Great Britain to establish herself north of the Hindu Kush and forestall Russia in the markets of Central Asia. These suspicions and fears were complicated by the changes and chances of the political situation in Europe, and by the ambitions and policies of the men on the spot who, in the days before speedy communications curbed such activities, made decisions and embarked on enterprises which often had neither the sanction nor even the approval of the governments they served.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, the two great rivals had by no means come to grips, but were still engaged in long distance reconnaissance through the agency of the smaller intervening powers. The Russians after a resumption of hostilities imposed in 1828 further terms on the Persians by the treaty of Turkmanchai, thereby extending and consolidating their possessions south of the Caucasus. The moral ascendancy achieved by these victories and the supineness of British policy increased Russian influence at Tehran, while at the same time it caused the Persians to seek by conquest in the east compensation for their losses in the west.

¹ Cf. an *Historical Summary of the Central Asian Question*, written for the Secretary of State in 1868, in which 'the glorious deeds of British arms' in 'conquering the warlike and powerful races of Hindostan' are contrasted with Russian treachery and covetousness.

Chapter V

THE STRUGGLE FOR HERAT

(I)

THE city of Herat has changed hands many times in history. Standing on the western flank of the Hindu Kush where the hills run out into the valley of the Hari Rud, it guards the road to Qandahar and India and yet is itself most open to attack from the north and west. It was a famous city once, after it had recovered from the scourge of Chenghiz Khan. Under Shah Rukh, son of Timur-i-Lang, Herat flourished as a centre of the Timurid Renaissance, and again in the early sixteenth century when Babur was first establishing himself in Kabul, his cousin Sultan Husain Mirza Baiqara made of Herat the most renowned centre of literature, culture, and art in all Central and Western Asia.

A few years later the city fell into the hands of the Uzbek leader, Shaybani Khan, who endeavoured to use it as a stepping-stone to the capture of Qandahar. He was unsuccessful, though his advance alarmed Babur sufficiently to cause him temporarily to evacuate Kabul. But as we have noticed the Uzbeks lacked the qualities of leadership and of determination which mark a race of conquerors. After Shaybani's death in 1509 at the hands of Shah Ismail, founder of the Safavi dynasty, Herat passed under Persian control, and remained an outpost of the Persian Empire until about 1715, when the Abdali Afghans of Herat threw off the Persian yoke. Nadir Shah regained possession of the city in 1732, but it passed finally into Afghan hands on Ahmad Shah's election to the Afghan throne in 1747. Seventy years later on the breakup of the Durrani Empire it became the last refuge of the Sadozai family. In 1818 Mahmud, last of the Sadozai rulers of Kabul, took refuge in Herat, where a few years later his son Kamran established himself as an independent monarch.

When therefore in 1828, after the peace of Turkmanchai, the Persians began to pay attention to their eastern borders they found the Afghan Empire split into three independent states,

Kabul and Qandahar under the Muhammadzai brothers Dost Muhammad and Kohendil Khan respectively, and Herat under the Sadozai Kamran, last of the legitimate ruling house, and a bitter enemy of the Muhammadzais. In the early 1830s the Persian heir-apparent and his son Muhammad Mirza, pursuing their objective of eastward expansion, led expeditions into Khurasan and threatened Herat, to which the Qajar dynasty laid claim as heirs to the Safavis. The death of the heir-apparent and the Shah within a few months of each other delayed for a time the development of these projects, while Muhammad Mirza was consolidating his position in Isfahan. These events also gave the Russian Foreign Minister, Count Nesselrode, an opportunity to express the hope that, with a view to maintaining not only the internal tranquillity but also the integrity and independence of Persia, the representatives of Russia and England at the Court of the new Shah would be 'authorized to act in concert in a spirit of peace and union. . . .'¹

These pious aspirations were reciprocated most cordially in London. But the understanding thus engendered did not prevent Lord Palmerston from instructing Mr. Ellis, the British representative in Tehran, a few months later, 'especially to warn the Persian Government against allowing themselves to be pushed on to make war against the Afghans'.² There is no mention of who was doing the pushing but the inference is obvious.

To this Ellis replied :

It is unsatisfactory to know that the Shah has very extended schemes of conquest in the direction of Afghanistan and, in common with all his subjects, conceives that the right of sovereignty over Herat and Qandahar is as complete now as in the reign of the Safavi dynasty.³

This letter was received in London in February 1836, a few months after Lord Auckland, the newly appointed Governor-General of India, had sailed for the East.

Lord Auckland is described by his contemporaries as a safe man, if neither brilliant nor profound. He owed his appointment to the restoration to office of Lord Melbourne and his Whig

¹ Count Nesselrode to Count Medem, Russian Ambassador in London, 22 August 1834. *Correspondence relating to Persia and Afghanistan*.

² Viscount Palmerston to Mr. Ellis, 25 July 1835. *Op. cit.*

³ Mr. Ellis to Viscount Palmerston, 13 November 1835. *Op. cit.*

associates after a brief Tory interregnum, and to the fact that India was entering on a period of internal tranquillity and prosperity, when a quiet, industrious head of the state would have opportunities for much good work and could hardly make any very serious errors. It was in such a spirit of peace and progress that the new Governor-General approached his task, and it was in keeping with this spirit that in the spring of 1836 he replied to Dost Muhammad's letter seeking his help in dealing with the Sikhs.¹ He was not inclined to take Dost Muhammad's request very seriously, and though his reply was cordial he brushed aside the Sikh question by referring to the practice of the British Government not to interfere with the affairs of other independent states. An incredible reply, viewed in the light of what was to follow, but in the spring of 1836 the international sky was still clear, at any rate in Calcutta, and Lord Auckland assuredly wrote in all sincerity. He went on to say that he had in mind a project for the economic development of the Indus basin, and that he proposed to send before long a representative to discuss certain commercial questions with the Amir.

And so the stage is set for the strange drama which is to follow. So complicated is the *mise en scène* that before the curtain goes up let us pass briefly in review the characters to whom the chief roles are assigned and the parts each has to play.

First in the background far off in London and St. Petersburg are Lord Palmerston and Count Nesselrode, the Foreign Ministers of their respective Governments, outwardly cordial and co-operative in the cause of peace, but inwardly distrustful each of the other, determined to lose no opportunity for advantage, playing the pieces on the dim, distant chess-board of Central Asia with little knowledge of the details but a shrewd understanding of the broad fundamental principles of the game.

Next, near in distance but farther off in understanding, is Lord Auckland, in residence in Calcutta or taking his leisurely way up the Ganges and across the plains 'to that pleasant hill sanitarium at Simla . . . which has been the cradle of more political insanity than any place within the limits of Hindustan'.²

We must deal fairly with Lord Auckland. He made mistakes enough in all conscience, and later historians have followed the

¹ See Pt. II, Ch. III.

² Sir William Kaye, *The War in Afghanistan*.

example of contemporary writers in seeing in him and his policy no redeeming features whatsoever. Perhaps they are right. It is at any rate certain that the sins of the Government of India during the unhappy years 1838 to 1842 were visited on the heads of their successors for many succeeding generations. But in fairness one must point out that Lord Auckland and his advisers are by no means the only rulers of India who have blundered over Afghan affairs. The policy of the Government of India in the 1870s, culminating in the Second Afghan War, was an unhappy blend of myopia and impatience, and there are other examples of similar ineptitude. Even Lord Curzon and his advisers showed by their attitude during the Afghan treaty negotiations of 1904-5 a failure to grasp the fundamentals of the Afghan problem or to understand the mentality of Afghan rulers.

It would seem therefore that in their handling of major questions of external policy the Government of India has not always been very fortunate. The extreme complexity of Central Asian politics, and the conflicting interests of military and political strategy along the north-western frontiers of India, account to some extent for this failure, to which at any rate in later years the composition of the Viceroy's Council, the Cabinet of India, tended to contribute. But more important than these has been the fact that the burden and interest of the internal administration of a subcontinent such as India tends to absorb the energies and focus the attention of its rulers to the exclusion of all else. In consequence external affairs, in a country so sheltered by nature from the outer world, have not always received the understanding nor the appreciation they have merited. We find the same defect in the United States of America up to quite recent times. It may perhaps best be defined in the words of an eminent historian as 'the fact that a superb administrator may be a purblind statesman',¹ and it may well account for the events of 1837 and 1838.

Alexander Burnes came nearest to understanding the true position, but neither Lord Auckland, nor his chief adviser, Sir William Macnaghten, ever seem to have grasped the realities of the Afghan situation. All that can be said of these men is that, considering the fog of ignorance in which they worked, they were no more purblind than many of their successors and that if their methods were deplorable, their attempt to extend the influence

¹ A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Abridgement, p. 358.

of the British Government right up to the Hindu Kush was strategically correct.

Two more Englishmen, Mr. John McNeill and Lieutenant Eldred Pottinger, and two more Russians, Count Simonich and Captain Vickovich, played prominent parts in the struggle. McNeill, British Envoy at the Court of the Shah, saw perhaps more clearly than anyone the strategic implications of a Persian capture of Herat under Russian auspices, and reported his views with an insistence which in the end impelled the British and Indian governments to decisive action. On Lieutenant Pottinger fell by chance the burden of upholding the defence of Herat, and right manfully did he fulfil his task. Without his presence to encourage and fortify the defenders Herat would assuredly have fallen, and the history of India and possibly of the world might well have taken a different course.

Count Simonich, the Tsar's envoy at the Shah's court, is one of those baffling figures which make Russian diplomacy so difficult to understand or to follow. He appears to have acted against the orders of his Government, and yet to have enjoyed their confidence. His influence with the Shah was great, and his policy one of veiled aggression, which could only have for its goal an eventual invasion of India. Such a policy was totally opposed to the professions of his Government, and when the Persians abandoned the siege of Herat Count Simonich was recalled and his policy repudiated. Was he working in accordance with the orders of his Government, or was he gambling on the certainty of Herat falling and on his Government's acceptance of a *fait accompli* as a happy stroke of fortune from which they might profit? It is impossible to say.

As for Captain Vickovich he was merely a pawn in the great game. His presence in Kabul could have been rendered innocuous by British diplomacy, but in the event he served to hasten the breakdown of negotiations which led directly to the First Afghan War. In the end he was sacrificed, as pawns are sacrificed when they have accomplished their purpose. British protests against his activities made it convenient for Count Nesselrode to disown him on his return to St. Petersburg. Whereupon the wretched Vickovich committed suicide.

We now come to the principal actors. Of these, Dost Muhammad, watching the scene from Kabul, had his eyes fixed

on Peshawar from which the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh had recently driven his brother. Peshawar and the trans-Indus territories were peopled by his own race; they had been an integral part of the Durrani Empire, and their loss to a Hindu Raj was indeed grievous to the Afghan ruler. Qandahar, where his brother Kohendil ruled precariously, could wait; even Herat with its Sadozai ruler was not so important an objective to Dost Muhammad as was the recovery of Peshawar. The age-old antagonism between Muslim and Hindu blinded the Dost to all other considerations and he turned for help in his struggle against Ranjit Singh to anyone who seemed likely to grant it.

To the Dost therefore the designs of the Shah on his western borders were not matters of first concern. He would have liked to take Herat himself and eventually did so, but his hatred of Kamran, the murderer of his brother Fath Khan, was intense, and outweighed in his mind the danger of a Persian invasion of Afghanistan. As for Kamran, after a life of debauchery and misrule, the last of the Sadozais had handed over control of his small state to his Wazir, Yar Muhammad, a most unscrupulous and yet clever villain on whom a contemporary writer has commented: 'If there was an abler or a worse man in Central Asia, I have not yet heard his name.'¹

But neither Kamran nor Kohendil in Qandahar could long have resisted Persian arms supported by Russian encouragement and advice, if the Shah had shown any spark of military genius. But the leadership of Nadir Shah was absent, and the armies of Muhammad Shah were of very different calibre from those which a hundred years before had defeated the great Afghan tribes and gained possession of Herat and Qandahar as a prelude to the invasion of India. No doubt Muhammad Shah had visions of emulating the deeds of the great Persian conquerors of the past; the attitude of the Afghan rulers flattered his hopes while Russian support encouraged his designs. It took him some time to realize that his projects of aggrandizement directly threatened the interests of the most stubborn adversary he had as yet encountered.

The immediate *casus belli* which made the siege of Herat an inevitable part of the Shah's policy was the refusal of the Afghan ruler, Kamran, to acknowledge Persian suzerainty. In this Kamran had the support of the British envoy, McNeill, who in

¹ Sir William Kaye, *The War in Afghanistan*.

June 1837 reported to Lord Palmerston that he 'regarded it as of the utmost importance to our security in India that Herat should not become available to any power which might obtain control over the councils of the Shah'.¹ In pursuance of this objective McNeill took a prominent part in endeavouring to dissuade the Shah from pursuing a policy which 'might diminish the cordiality which had so long subsisted between England and Persia'.²

McNeill failed in his efforts to persuade the Shah to accept the very favourable terms offered by Kamran, and at the end of July the Shah moved on Herat. The British and Russian envoys remained in Tehran, watching each other's moves in a manner very different from the 'spirit of peace and union' envisaged by their chiefs in London and St. Petersburg. How far Simonich was responsible for the Shah's decision to undertake the siege in person it is impossible to say. He informed McNeill in June that on instructions from his Government he had refrained from urging the Shah to prosecute the war. But since he admitted at the same time that in the previous year he had disobeyed similar instructions from his Government, McNeill found it difficult to attach much credence to his statements. There seems little doubt that Count Simonich, if not his Government, was well satisfied with the way Persian policy was shaping.

For the next four months the Shah and his army were pursuing their leisurely way eastward towards the Afghan border and Herat. We may leave them to do so while we turn to consider developments in India and at Kabul, where in the summer of 1837 Dost Muhammad was awaiting the arrival of the British envoy, Captain Burnes, who in fulfilment of Lord Auckland's promise of the previous year was on his way to Kabul to discuss with the Afghan ruler a project for the economic development of the Indus basin and cognate questions.

These economic projects which had for their objective the development of trade between India and her north-western neighbours, were harmless enough in themselves. They were the outcome of the reports of a number of British agents and travellers who in the previous half-century had penetrated beyond the Indus, and reached even as far as the Caspian Sea. In so

¹ McNeill to Viscount Palmerston, 30 June 1837. *Correspondence relating to Persia and Afghanistan.*

² Ibid.

doing they had covered much country and brought back with them optimistic reports of the prospects of Central Asian trade, reports which as we shall see at a later date did not escape the attention of the Russian Government. Prominent among these agents was Alexander Burnes, a young Scotchman of considerable promise and enterprise, who in 1832 in the course of a journey to Bukhara and Persia, had been hospitably entertained by Dost Muhammad in Kabul. It was natural, therefore, that Lord Auckland, looking round for someone to undertake a commercial mission of no very great importance to the Afghan Amir, should have selected this enthusiastic young civil servant whose pleasant manner, ready wit, and proficiency in Persian had already made him *persona grata* in Kabul. In the autumn of 1836 Burnes, who was at the time engaged in negotiations with the Amirs of Sind, received orders to proceed to Bombay prior to undertaking a mission which had for its objective the policy of opening the River Indus to commerce. On 26 November Burnes with two companions, Lieutenant Leech of the Bombay Engineers and Lieutenant Wood of the Indian Navy, set out for Kabul.

The economic developments adumbrated in the dispatch of this mission were in accordance with the programme of peaceful economic expansion which Lord Auckland had brought with him from home and which he would gladly have followed. Such a policy was entirely in accordance with his own ideas, with his temperament, and with his instructions.

At the same time, however, the developments of Russian policy in Persia and the warnings sent home by Mr. Ellis of their probable outcome had caused the Court of Directors of the East India Company to view the situation on and beyond the Indian frontiers with considerable misgivings. In a dispatch to Lord Auckland dated 25 June 1836 the Secret Committee commented particularly on two letters which had recently arrived in London from Tehran. In the first of these Mr. Ellis stated his conviction that the Shah would 'lose no opportunity of forming connections with the Chief of Cabool and his brothers', with the object of securing possession of Herat from the rival Sadozais.¹ In the second he announced the arrival in Tehran of an envoy from the Chiefs of Qandahar :

The object of the Mission has been to enter into an alliance, offensive

¹ Mr. Ellis to Viscount Palmerston, 15 February 1836. Op. cit.

and defensive with the Shah, and more especially to unite in the attack upon Kamran Mirza of Herat, between whom and the Chiefs of Qandahar, who are brothers of the Chief of Kabul, there exists a blood feud.¹

The implications of these moves were disquieting. Although the immediate objective was nothing more than the capture of Herat, an offensive and defensive alliance between Persia and Afghanistan, which would undoubtedly have Russian support, would bring Russian influence into very close proximity to the Indus Valley. A counter move was essential.

And so in their dispatch of 25 June the Secret Committee requested Lord Auckland to consider

what steps it may be proper and desirable for you to take to watch more closely than has hitherto been attempted the progress of events in Afghanistan and to counteract the progress of Russian influence in a quarter which, from its proximity to our Indian possessions, could not fail if it were once established to act injuriously on the system of our Indian alliance, and possibly to interfere even with the tranquillity of our own territory.

The mode of dealing with this very important question, whether by despatching a confidential agent to Dost Muhammad of Kabul merely to watch the progress of events, or to enter into relations with this chief, either of a political or merely in the first instance of a commercial character, we confide to your discretion, as well as the adoption of any other measures that may appear to you to be desirable in order to counteract Russian influence in that quarter, should you be satisfied from the information received from your own agent on the frontier, or hereafter from Mr. McNeill, on his arrival in Persia, that the time has arrived at which it would be right for you to interfere decidedly in the affairs of Afghanistan.

There is something very peculiar about this most important dispatch. Sir William Kaye, best-known contemporary historian of the events leading up to the First Afghan War,² makes no mention of it. Sir Auckland Colvin, who some forty years later took up the cudgels in defence of Lord Auckland's Private Secretary, John Russell Colvin, sees in this dispatch and in the instructions it conveyed a vindication of Lord Auckland's Afghan policy. 'It is evident that Lord Auckland's position after the receipt of

¹ Mr. Ellis to Viscount Palmerston, 1 April 1836. Op. cit.

² *History of the War in Afghanistan.*

this most important despatch was clearly and squarely laid down for him.'¹

But was it? I do not think so. It was an extremely able document. It emphasized the importance of the Russian threat to the security of India and it indicated in general terms the British objective, which was to 'counteract Russian influence' in Kabul. But it left the Governor-General with complete discretion, as the man on the spot, to attain the desired object, by any means he thought suitable.

The most peculiar thing about this despatch is, however, the effect it had on Lord Auckland. One is reminded of the well-known story of Sherlock Holmes and the dog:

'... the curious incident of the dog in the night time.'

'The dog did nothing in the night time.'

'That was the curious incident,' remarked Sherlock Holmes.²

Lord Auckland did nothing. Burnes had not yet left Bombay on his commercial mission to Dost Muhammad when the Governor-General received instructions of immediate and pressing importance to counteract Russian influence in Kabul. One would have thought that by no possible stretch of the imagination could the Government of India have concluded that a diplomatic mission of such importance should be entrusted to an enterprising young political officer of thirty-two, unfurnished with either staff, retinue, or presents suitable for such an occasion. They might at least have summoned Burnes to Calcutta for consultation before sending him forth on so fateful a quest.

But Lord Auckland took no action. When the Secret Committee's letter was received a despatch giving some account of Burnes's projected commercial mission to Kabul and Qandahar was ready in Calcutta for issue. To this despatch was now added the following postscript:

Since the above was written we have had the honour to receive your letter dated the 25th June, with its enclosures. Your Honourable Committee will observe from this communication that we had in a great degree anticipated your instructions. The subject will continue to engage our most serious attention.³

¹ Sir A. Colvin, *John Russell Colvin*, p. 88.

² 'Silver Blaze', from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, by Conan Doyle.

³ This despatch is undated but must have issued from Calcutta in October or November 1836.

This laconic and not very lucid paragraph appears to have been the only official rejoinder to the Secret Committee's vitally important directive. It is a striking indication of how from the outset the Governor-General and his advisers failed to appreciate the strategic and political significance of the situation confronting them, a failure which is emphasized in his private correspondence. In a letter to Sir John Hobhouse, President of the Board of Control, written at this time, Lord Auckland complains rather querulously of the inconsiderateness of the Persians in 'throwing into confusion the countries of Herat, Kandahar, and Kabul where all was more than sufficiently weak and unsettled before'. He adds that it would not be easy 'for us to take any steps to counteract this move from India'.

It is of course true that in allowing Burnes to proceed on his commercial mission Lord Auckland was carrying out one of the courses of action suggested by the Secret Committee. And it is also true that in the winter of 1836-7 Persian designs on Herat were in abeyance and the Russians temporarily quiescent. It was possible for Lord Auckland and his advisers, pursuing their objective of peaceful progress, to shut their ears to the far-off rumblings of discord from Tehran and to close their minds to anything so disagreeable as a threat to the peace of India. It was perhaps possible for Lord Auckland thus to find a reason for doing nothing, and in so doing to salve his conscience, but it was not the act of a statesman.

A few months later it became obvious even to the Government in Calcutta that Burnes's mission, in spite of its façade of commercial negotiation, must inevitably concern itself mainly with political developments. In a letter sent from Calcutta in May the Chief Secretary, Mr. (afterwards Sir William) Macnaghten, conveyed to Burnes certain not very precise instructions which had the effect of turning his mission rather into one of political intelligence than of commercial negotiation.¹ As the summer went on and Burnes was pursuing his leisurely way up the Indus to Peshawar and so through the Khyber Pass to Kabul, reports of Persian preparations against Herat and the arrival in Kabul of a Persian envoy disturbed still further the authorities at Calcutta. In a letter dispatched ten days before Burnes reached Kabul,

¹ Secretary Macnaghten to Captain Burnes, dated 15 May 1837. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. XXV, 1859.

Macnaghten conveyed further instructions which completely altered the complexion of Burnes's mission and his objectives.¹ It is a letter of the first importance since it discloses with the utmost clarity the lack of political sense and of perception in the minds of the Governor-General and his Counsellors. The political objective, clearly stated by the Secret Committee, was to counteract Russian influence, and yet no mention of Russia is made anywhere in the letter. On the contrary the Government of India's main preoccupation was for 'the honour and just wishes of our old and firm ally Ranjit Singh', the Sikh leader, and sworn enemy of Dost Muhammad. Never can an envoy have received more obscure and unpalatable instructions on which to base a bid for the friendship of a foreign potentate.

But worst of all the Governor-General decided not to give Burnes 'any direct political power' or to invest him with real authority to negotiate or any bargaining counter. He was merely to argue and report for instructions. This was no doubt looked on as a necessary precaution in view of Burnes's youth and inexperience, but surely the authorities at Calcutta should have had sufficient experience in dealing with orientals to know that no matter what was Burnes's real position Dost Muhammad would inevitably look on him as a plenipotentiary, and be deeply chagrined when he could obtain nothing from him except the formal and unsympathetic replies of his Government.

And so in the autumn of 1837 we find Burnes arriving in Kabul armed with instructions which were bound to alienate the ruler whose friendship he sought,² while the Shah moved slowly eastwards across Persia to lay siege to the vital outpost of Herat and threaten the integrity of Afghanistan and India. At this moment when above all other times the Governor-General required the best advice the Government of India could offer, and the tranquillity of Government House in which to concentrate on the vital and complex problems before him, we find him setting forth

¹ Secretary Macnaghten to Captain Burnes, dated 11 September 1837. Appendix I.

² These instructions were rammed home in a letter to Burnes dated 13 September from Mr. John Colvin, Lord Auckland's private secretary: 'It must be nearly needless to say that you are in a position in which you should regulate your conduct marking the firm maintenance of our old alliance and friendship with Ranjit Singh as the avowed first principle of our duty and policy and bringing Dost Muhammad to his senses and to a just measure of his most hazardous position.' *Auckland Papers*: British Museum Add. MSS.

in October 1837 on a progress through India which was for close on eighteen months to separate him from his Council, and subject him to all the distractions and discomforts of an endless series of social activities and of an ever-moving camp.¹

It is difficult to preserve equanimity in the face of such crass stupidity. For in those fateful years from 1836 to 1842 history was being made which was to affect the fortunes and influence the actions of the players on the great Central Asian stage for many a long day. Nearly a hundred years after the Burnes mission, we who took up the task of British representation in Kabul after the First World War realized how much had to be lived down, and how great must be the patience and the forbearance of the British envoy and his Government if our mission was not to follow in the footsteps of Burnes or even perhaps of Cavagnari.²

For Burnes's mission failed. It was perhaps foredoomed to failure, and yet it would appear that only a modicum of imagination and sympathy on the part of Lord Auckland and his advisers would have turned failure into success. The Amir greeted Burnes with warmth and treated him with the utmost frankness and cordiality. He admitted readily his connexion and correspondence with Persia, to whom he had turned in his difficulties over the Sikh occupation of Peshawar after seeking in vain for the friendship of the British Government. But he placed no reliance on Persia; he was fully prepared to drop all connexion with the Shah, and deeply regretted that he and his brother in Qandahar should have offered their allegiance to that ruler. In Burnes's presence he wrote to Kohendil urging him not to send his son to do homage to the Shah, for 'how can we enter on an alliance with others if the English exhibit to us friendship. . . . I see nothing for the Musalmans, in their war against the Sikhs, but to be friendly with the English Government and endeavour to please them.'³ In forwarding this letter to the Governor-General Burnes emphasized Dost Muhammad's favourable attitude and quoted his statement that 'the Afghans had no sympathy with Persia, and if Herat fell into the hands of that kingdom, of which there now appeared a great probability it was

¹ For an account of this journey see *Up the Country*, by Emily Eden.

² See p. 147.

³ Dost Muhammad to the Chief of Qandahar, 25 October 1837. *Correspondence relating to Persia and Afghanistan*.

time to unite their strength, or to take measures which would place the resources of Kabul and Qandahar in one hand'. Burnes trusted that Dost Muhammad's conduct would appear 'in a light that must prove, as I believe, very gratifying to Government'.¹

In the middle of November Burnes was disturbed to learn that Vickovich, the Russian agent, had arrived in the city bearing a letter from the Tsar, in reply to one written by Dost Muhammad imploring Russian help against the Sikhs. The Amir treated the whole incident with the utmost frankness, sought Burnes's permission before receiving Vickovich, and showed him the Tsar's letter which was quite innocuous and made no reference to political matters.

On 23 December Burnes, who by this time had been three months in Kabul, and as a result of many interviews was fully conversant with the views of Dost Muhammad, wrote a long confidential letter to Lord Auckland² setting forth in detail his views on the situation and the measures he proposed to deal with it. It is strange that this letter is not referred to by Kaye,³ for it is the turning-point of the negotiations. In it Burnes marshals his argument with clarity, selects the salient features of the situation with a prescience worthy of an experienced diplomat, and does not hesitate to advocate a line of action which he realizes might be unpalatable to his Chief. He had already pointed out to Lord Auckland that the stability of the Sikh alliance depended on the life of one man, and that once Ranjit Singh had gone tranquillity in the territories of the Sikhs could not be looked for.⁴ He now drew attention to the unhappy effect on the Afghans of Ranjit Singh's aggressive policy and of British indifference, which had caused Dost Muhammad in despair to seek help from Russia and from Persia. And yet as soon as the British showed an interest in his affairs the Amir was prepared to drop all other connexions and ally himself to the one power in a position to

¹ Captain Burnes to Mr. Macnaghten, 31 October 1837. Op. cit.

² Captain Burnes to The Rt. Hon. Lord Auckland, 23 December 1837. Op. cit.

³ Particularly strange in view of the fact that Kaye edited the ungarbled version of these dispatches as presented to the House of Commons in 1859. The original version omitted all paragraphs which reflected adversely on Government's policy and action.

⁴ Burnes to Macnaghten, dated 3 December 1837. Op. cit. A very true prophecy. Ranjit Singh died eighteen months later and within ten years the Panjab and Frontier Provinces had been added to the British Dominions, at the close of the Second Sikh War.

bring peaceful pressure on the Sikh Khalsa. In return for the restoration of Peshawar Dost Muhammad was prepared to make considerable overtures.

There was surely nothing in them [wrote Burnes] contrary to the dignity of His Highness; an independent chief offers to pay him allegiance and regular tribute, and to send a son to sue for forgiveness. His Highness need not accept the terms, and perhaps Dost Muhammad will in the end be satisfied with the plain of Peshawar being given to any Barukzye, but it becomes a matter of great moment that this question should be speedily adjusted. . . . [The Maharajah's] attack on Peshawar drove the Afghans to seek for alliances which are injurious to British interests, and it is surely not asking too much of Ranjit Singh to act with promptitude in the adjustment of a matter which while it hangs over, brings intrigues to our door, and if not checked may shortly bring enemies instead of messengers. In a settlement of the Peshawar affair we have, as it seems to me, an immediate remedy against further intrigue, and a means of showing to the Afghans that the British Government does sympathize with them and at one and the same time satisfying the chiefs, and gaining both our political and commercial ends.

If steps were taken to meet Afghan wishes in regard to Peshawar Burnes considered that Afghan gratitude would make it easy to form a league among the Sunni Muhammadans of Bukhara, Kunduz, Herat, Qandahar, and Kabul, 'which under British guidance would arrest the designs of Russia and Persia. . . .'

If often happens that the historian in endeavouring to appraise past events draws unconsciously on information which was not in the possession of the actors he is criticizing, and on arguments which could not have been before them when they took their decisions. On this occasion no such danger arises. Lord Auckland had all the facts. Burnes emphasized that the Afghans, secure among their hills, had nothing to fear from the Sikhs, but that there would never be peace between them unless the Sikhs were prepared to restore Peshawar in some measure to the Durrani kingdom. This was the climax of the whole affair; which would Lord Auckland choose to support—Hindu or Muslim? He chose the Hindus, the Sikh Confederacy, kept together by the failing strength of an old man, and destined to be at war with Britain within eight years. One wonders whether Lord Auckland would have been quite so anxious to maintain the Sikh alliance

had he met Ranjit Singh before and not after the die was cast for the invasion of Afghanistan.¹ As it was, he was not destined to meet the Sikh ruler for another year. In December 1837 the Governor-General was moving northwards through Oude, by Cawnpore to Bareilly where on 20 January without, of course, ever having time to consult the Council in Calcutta, Macnaghten replied to Burnes's proposals.

The Governor-General was much annoyed with Burnes for taking too much on himself in his dealings with the Afghan chiefs, and desired him to explain to them that he had exceeded his instructions. Having thus severely snubbed his unfortunate envoy Lord Auckland proceeded to disagree with his proposals. He reiterated that he had no intention of doing more than ask Ranjit Singh not to prosecute war against Afghanistan. He did not agree with Burnes that Dost Muhammad had nothing to fear from the Sikhs, and insisted that he must first make overtures for peace and endeavour to 'appease the feelings of the powerful sovereign whom he had offended'. If he were to do this and at the same time 'relinquish . . . alliances with any power to the westward', he could count on the continuance of British good offices, but not otherwise. If the Amir should 'prefer to incur all the hazards of his position rather than to accept our good offices upon the only terms which seem to be just in regard to Maharajah Ranjit Singh, your Mission will in that case solicit its dismissal and retire upon Peshawar'.²

This was in fact the end of the negotiations. Burnes remained in Kabul till the latter half of April striving to find a solution between two irreconcilable points of view. But no solution was possible, and in April he asked for his dismissal: He left Kabul on 26 April. From Jalalabad on his journey to Peshawar he reported to the Governor-General in Simla that the Amir was deep in conclave with the Russian agent. Only a week or so earlier Burnes had passed on messages from Eldred Pottinger in Herat to the effect that the city could hardly hold out against the Persians beyond the end of April.³ Almost at the same time

¹ Cf. *Up the Country*, the Hon. Emily Eden's diary of the tour, entry for 17 December 1838: 'Whenever he [Ranjit] dies this great kingdom which he has raked together, will probably fall to pieces again.'

² Macnaghten to Burnes, 20 January 1838. *Correspondence relating to Persia and Afghanistan*.

³ Burnes to Macnaghten, 19 April 1838. Op. cit.

McNeill reported to Lord Palmerston from the Persian camp before Herat that the city was now completely invested, though the defence was most stubborn. He also forwarded the draft of a treaty between the Shah and the chiefs of Qandahar the fulfilment of which was to be guaranteed by the Russian Ambassador at Tehran.¹

In the face of all these developments it is difficult to account for Lord Auckland's deliberate refusal to make any concession whatever to Dost Muhammad's attitude. The Sikhs were by no means happy in their occupation of Peshawar and intervention by the British Government might well have afforded them an occasion for granting to an ally a favour which they would not bestow on an enemy, while at the same time permitting their withdrawal from a difficult situation. We can only imagine that Lord Auckland, seeking amid the welter of intrigue and double dealing which filled the vast arena from Tehran to Lahore some stable element on which to base his policy, found, as he believed, in the Sikh Confederacy a staunch and reliable ally, whose friendship he was in no way prepared to endanger. In contrast, Dost Muhammad was a somewhat shadowy figure, ruler of a little principality whose recent history gave Lord Auckland no cause for confidence, and on whose stability he could place but little reliance. His chief adviser, Macnaghten, had visited the Sikh capital and had knowledge at first hand of the strength and resources of its ruler. His counsels far outweighed the distant pleadings of young Burnes, who having once stated his case officially had not the standing, if he had possessed the strength of character, to maintain the Afghan case against such opposition. Burnes was, however, to make one more effort to save the situation. He was asked on his arrival in India to state his views 'on the means of counteraction which should be presented to Dost Muhammad Khan in the policy that he is pursuing'. In reply he gave various possible courses of action, but still showed his preference for dealing with Dost Muhammad. There is a note of impending tragedy in his concluding paragraph :

But it remains to be considered why we cannot act with Dost Muhammad. He is a man of undoubted ability, and has at heart high opinions of the British nation : and if half you must do for others were done

¹ McNeill to Lord Palmerston, 11 April 1838. Op. cit.

for him, and offers made which he could see conducted to his interests, he would abandon Persia and Russia to-morrow. It may be said that that opportunity has been given to him, but I would rather discuss this in person with you, for I think there is much to be said for him. Government have admitted that at best he had but a choice of difficulties and it should not be forgotten that we promised nothing, and Persia and Russia held out a great deal. . . . The man has something in him, and if Afghans are proverbially not to be trusted I see no reason for having greater mistrust of him than of others.¹

This appeal fell on deaf ears. The Governor-General preferred to rely on a previous paragraph in the same letter in which Burnes stated his belief that if Dost Muhammad was to be replaced on the Afghan throne, 'The British Government have only to send Shuja-ul-Mulk to Peshawar with an agent and two of its own regiments, as an honorary escort, and an avowal to the Afghans that we have taken up his cause to ensure his being fixed for ever on his Throne.'²

This statement was a strange and fatal blunder, from a man of Burnes's political sense and understanding of the Afghan character. It savours of weakness, of a desire common in a certain grade of intelligence officer 'to tell Master something he wanted to hear'. Coming as it did from the man who knew or should have known more about the state of feeling in Afghanistan than any other Englishman, it was eagerly grasped by Lord Auckland who, leaning on this opinion as on a staff, set forth on the second stage of his perilous Afghan journey.

(2)

We must now return to Persia to the Shah's camp outside Herat, where since 1 December 1837 his army had been prosecuting the siege of the city with but little success. In February 1838 the British envoy, McNeill, reported from Tehran that the city was holding out well, but that the Persians had penetrated north-eastwards as far as Maimana and so had cut off any hope of assistance reaching the Afghans from that quarter. McNeill

¹ Burnes to Macnaghten, 2 June 1838. Op. cit.

² Ibid.

was, however, uneasy about the situation and urged strong measures to arrest the Persian advance.¹ His uneasiness increased, and in March he made up his mind to go himself to the Persian camp and endeavour to persuade the Shah to raise the siege and conclude a treaty with the ruler of Herat. He informed Lord Palmerston of his intention,² and at the same time forwarded a report from his assistant, Colonel Stoddart, who had accompanied the Shah. This report showed that overtures of peace had been made by Kamran through Lieutenant Pottinger to the Shah, who had replied insisting on what amounted to unconditional surrender. The siege was therefore to continue, but McNeill still retained a hope of being able to influence the Shah to withdraw.

McNeill reached the camp in the first week of April and as we have seen³ reported immediately on the gravity of the situation. He realized that if the blockade continued Herat must eventually surrender and he continued 'to be of the opinion that the fall of Herat would destroy our position in Afghanistan and place all or nearly all that country under the influence or authority of Russia and Persia'.⁴ As he wrote these words our position in Afghanistan had already been destroyed and Burnes was preparing to depart from Kabul.

But McNeill could do very little. He felt strongly and wrote strongly both to India and England, but there was a time lag of nearly six months between the dispatch of a letter to his chief in London and the receipt of a reply. Without instructions McNeill could hardly call the Shah's bluff.

Meanwhile he did what he could. He suggested to Lord Auckland that a British force should move with Afghan permission to the relief of Herat, ignoring the fact that under Article 9 of the Anglo-Persian Treaty of 1814 the British Government undertook in the event of war between the Afghans and Persians not to interfere with either party unless their mediation to effect a peace shall be solicited by both parties.⁵ He then insisted on an audience with the Shah in spite of the fact that the latter had done everything possible to prevent his coming to his camp and

¹ McNeill to Palmerston, 23 February 1838. *Correspondence relating to Persia and Afghanistan*.

² Ibid., 8 March 1838. Op. cit.

³ McNeill to Palmerston, 11 April 1838. Op. cit.

⁴ p. 98.

⁵ *Aitchison's Treaties*. Vol. XIII, No. VII (Persia).

had shown marked displeasure at his arrival. He managed to produce at this audience an atmosphere sufficiently favourable to induce the Shah to agree to his mediation with the ruler of Herat. McNeill undertook this mission and a grand assault on the city was postponed to enable him to pass through the lines. He returned the following day to the Persian camp, bearing proposals for a treaty of peace which might well have been acceptable to the Persian Government, only to find that Count Simonich who had followed hot-foot from Tehran had reached the camp the night before.

It must have been an exasperating moment for the British envoy. While he was absent in the citadel of Herat, discussing the proposed terms with Yar Muhammad, Kamran's able Wazir, the Russians had been in conclave with the Shah. The result was apparent next day. McNeill 'found the Shah's views had undergone an important change; his manner was more abrupt and peremptory; he at once rejected the proposed agreement and spoke of prosecuting the siege'.¹

In both Afghanistan and Persia British diplomacy had suffered severe defeats within a few weeks of each other. McNeill remained on in the Persian camp till June. But his position became increasingly difficult. Simonich's star was in the ascendant; he himself advised on the future prosecution of the siege and deputed one of his staff to supervise preparations for a further offensive. He was high in the Shah's favour, his agent, Vickovich, was still in Kabul, while his influence was attracting the Qandahar chiefs into the Persian orbit.

McNeill was meanwhile treated with scant courtesy by the Persians, who made use of all the minor exasperating forms of annoyance which Orientals so often employ towards envoys who have fallen into disfavour. Customary courtesies were neglected, access to the British envoy was forbidden, and most serious of all, his messengers, Persian subjects, were ill-treated and imprisoned. The envoy protested in vain, the replies of the Persian Ministers were equivocal, while the Shah procrastinated and haggled over the question of Herat. Finally on 7 June McNeill, having been given permission by Lord Palmerston to break off his relations with the Shah if his demands for personal redress were not met, quitted the camp and started on a journey

¹ McNeill to Palmerston, 12 May 1838. Op. cit.

across Persia to the Turkish frontier, there to await further instructions from London.

He had not yet arrived at Tehran when the long-awaited reply to his letter of 8 March ¹ reached him. It was a reply to delight the heart of an exasperated envoy, provided the instructions had not reached him too late. It was Palmerston at his best, not the Radical Jingo described so pungently in a recent history of this period,² but a statesman who trusted his subordinate and knew when to strike.

You are instructed to proceed at once to the Shah [ran the letter] and to declare to him explicitly that the British Government cannot view with indifference his project of conquering Afghanistan.

That the British Government must look upon this enterprise as undertaken in a spirit of hostility towards British India, and as being wholly incompatible with the spirit and intention of the Alliance which has been established between Persia and Great Britain. That consequently if this project be persevered in, the friendly relations which up to this time have so happily subsisted between Great Britain and Persia must necessarily cease; and that Great Britain must take such steps as she may think best calculated to provide for the security of the possessions of the British Crown.³

This letter reached McNeill at about the same time as information of the seizure by a force sent by the Government of India of the island of Kharag in the Persian Gulf, to act as a base for any employment deemed necessary to maintain British interests in Persia. Latest news from Herat showed that the garrison, encouraged by the gallantry and leadership of Pottinger, had withstood and repulsed with heavy loss an assault which followed six days' incessant battering of the defences. Count Simonich had planned the attack and his prestige had suffered; at the same time Russian successes in Kabul and with the chiefs of Qandahar made McNeill none too certain of the outcome when he sent his assistant, Colonel Stoddart, back to the Persian camp with an urgent message for the Shah.

In reporting his action to Lord Palmerston, McNeill stated that he had pitched the tone of his letter in even stronger terms

¹ p. 100.

² G. M. Trevelyan, *British History in the 19th Century*, p. 297.

³ Palmerston to McNeill, 21 May 1838. *Correspondence relating to Persia and Afghanistan*.

than those contained in his instructions, since when they wrote these His Majesty's Government

had not yet become acquainted with the treaty, negotiated under the mediation and guarantee of Russia, between Persia and Qandahar ; nor with the nature of the proposition made by the Shah to the Herat Government ; nor with the language I had already ventured to hold to the Shah ; nor with the circumstances which had forced me to leave the Shah's camp, nor with the failure of the negotiations at Kabul and Qandahar and the return of Captain Burnes to India ; nor with the arrival of the troops from India at Kharag.¹

Stoddart returned to the Persian camp bearing the envoy's letter to the Shah, while McNeill himself resumed his march to the Turkish frontier. On 11 September he had reached Tabriz when a letter from Stoddart overtook him, written from the Persian camp. In it Stoddart described his audience with the Shah.

To-day at half past ten a.m. I received an official note from the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs requesting me to accompany him, agreeably to the Shah's direction, to the royal presence. I accordingly went and was handsomely received. After delivering your letter I delivered the message in Persian. On my coming to a pause . . . His Majesty said, ' The fact is, if I don't leave Herat there will be war, is that not it ? ' I said, ' It is war, all depends on your Majesty's answer. God preserve your Majesty.' . . . he said, ' This was all I wished ; I asked the Minister for it, and he would not give it, alleging that he was not authorised.' I said, ' He was not then, but now he is ordered to give it. No one could give such a message without special authority from our Sovereign.'²

The Shah was in fact not prepared to face the threat of war with Britain. The British note, the occupation of Kharag, and the steady progress of the British envoy towards the Turkish border convinced him at last that the British Government were in earnest. These events came at a decisive moment. At the end of a nine months' siege Herat, though in desperate straits, was still holding out, the morale of the Persian army was at its lowest ebb, and the Russians though full of specious promises had no concrete successes to their credit. The Shah gave way, and in spite of Russian exhortations and threats prepared to

¹ McNeill to Palmerston, 30 July 1838. Op. cit.

² Stoddart to McNeill, 12 August 1838. Op. cit.

abandon the siege and return to Tehran. The customary confusion inseparable in Persia from such a decision delayed the departure of the army till September, but there is a triumphant ring about the postscript to Stoddart's final report to McNeill dated from 'Near Herat' at 26 minutes past ten o'clock a.m. on 9 September: 'The Shah has mounted his horse' (Ameerij) 'and is gone!'

With the Shah went also all hopes the Russians may have entertained of the outcome of this, their first attempt, to extend their influence across the Afghan border and to gain possession in fact if not in name of the great flanking bastion of the Hindu Kush. It had been a near thing; a little more determination by the Shah before the walls of Herat and a little less courage by the Afghans within them would certainly have altered the story of the Hindu Kush and might well have affected the future of all Central Asia. As it was the menace which had hung heavy over Afghanistan and India disappeared, and the only thing left was for the British and Russian Governments to hold a post-mortem on the corpse of Persian ambitions. Lengthy notes were exchanged and in the end mutual satisfaction was expressed by each party at the pacific intentions of the other.

Out of this lengthy correspondence we may extract two matters of interest. In the official exchange of notes Count Simonich's actions were supported by his Government with some show of plausibility. But in conversation with the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, Lord Clanricarde, Count Nesselrode admitted that 'Count Simonich had certainly acted in a manner of which you had a right to complain; and therefore that functionary had been recalled'.¹ It is very difficult not to be biased, but I cannot help feeling a strong suspicion that this was not the reason why Count Simonich was recalled. He was recalled because he failed, and in consequence made a convenient scapegoat.

The other matter of interest is the pointed reference by the Russian Government in a despatch from St. Petersburg to the indefatigable activity displayed by English travellers to spread disquiet among the people of Central Asia, and to carry agitation even into the heart of the countries bordering on our frontier whilst on our part we ask nothing but to be admitted to partake in fair competition the commercial advantages of Asia. English industry, exclusive and jealous,

¹ Clanricarde to Palmerston, 20 November 1838. Op. cit.

would deprive us entirely of the benefits which it pretends to reap alone ; and would cause, if it could, the produce of our manufactories to disappear from all the markets of Central Asia : Witness the remarks of Burnes, and the tendency of English travellers who have followed his steps on the road to Bukhara, and to the very gates of Orenberg.¹

Herein we see one of the main factors in the development of Anglo-Russian policy in Central Asia during the ensuing seventy years.

¹ Nesselrode to Pozzo di Borgo, Russian Ambassador in London, 20 October 1838. Op. cit.

Chapter VI

THE FIRST AFGHAN WAR

(1838-1842)

IT must be admitted by even the severest critic that Lord Auckland's position in the spring of 1838 was one of extraordinary difficulty. Herat was sorely beset, Burnes had failed and McNeill looked like failing too, while the chiefs of Qandahar and Kabul were in close communication with the Shah and his Russian advisers. Internally India was in a ferment; the states of Indore, Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Kotah were all more or less in confusion, active measures against the Gaekwar of Baroda seemed likely, and war with both Ava and Nepal was brewing.¹ The Sikh Confederacy alone represented stability, and a closer alliance with Ranjit Singh might well have a steadying effect on the internal situation. As for Afghanistan the Sikhs were already in treaty relations with Shah Shuja, the ex-Amir, whose attempt to regain the throne in 1834 had received their support. To Lord Auckland, brooding over the whole business in May 1838, his policy may well have seemed clear if distasteful. The common enemy was Dost Muhammad, the objective his removal and replacement by Shah Shuja, who in Burnes's estimation was assured of a ready welcome in Afghanistan. To replace one ruler by another in a country which had transferred its allegiance eight times in the past forty-five years did not seem a formidable project, nor one which was likely to present much difficulty to a power whose progress in the domination of India had been one of steady and unbroken success. Of the various courses open to him in May 1838 Lord Auckland favoured the one which would permit or encourage 'the advance of Ranjit Singh's armies upon Kabul, under counsel and restriction, and as subsidiary to his advance to organize an expedition headed by Shah Shuja', for which the British would supply the money, would appoint an accredited agent to accompany the Shah's camp, and would

¹ Lord Auckland to the Secret Committee, 13 August 1838. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. XXV, 1859.

furnish a certain number of British officers to direct the movements of the Shah's army.¹

This plan seemed cheap and satisfactory to the Court of Directors, and they approved it. It gave the Sikhs the principal role, as being nearer and more openly hostile to the Afghan ruler, and imposed a very small measure of responsibility coupled with a modest financial outlay on the British. But it depended for its success on the willingness of the Sikh ruler to risk his armies among the Afghan hills and on the readiness of the Afghans to accept as a ruler a man whom thirty years before they had driven from the throne.

Ranjit Singh knew the Afghans, if Lord Auckland did not. He had had constant dealings with them since, forty years earlier, Zaman Shah had appointed him Governor of the Panjab. He was well aware how formidable they could be among the fastnesses of their own country and how bitterly they resented and would contest foreign domination. He was not at all prepared to venture the armies of the Khalsa among those bleak, unprofitable hills; at the same time the attitude of Dost Muhammad over Peshawar was a constant menace to the rather precarious hold of the Sikhs on their trans-Indus territories.

And so when in May 1838 Lord Auckland's envoy, Macnaghten, inquired from the Maharajah whether he would like to revive his treaty with Shah Shuja, and have the British Government become a party to it, Ranjit Singh replied that this 'would be adding sugar to milk'. The tripartite treaty was discussed and signed; it was concerned with arrangements between the Maharajah and Shah Shuja after the latter had established himself in Kabul; it bore no reference to how he was to get there or who was to keep him on his throne.

For this task Macnaghten was authorized to suggest alternative lines of action to the Maharajah, either that he should act in concert with the British Government for the restoration of Shah Shuja, or that he should adopt his own course in dealing with Dost Muhammad. Ranjit Singh chose the former, 'evinced not only anxiety but eagerness to co-operate in the combined plan of action with the British Government'.²

Of course! One of the most interesting features of this

¹ Lord Auckland: Minute of 12 May 1838. Op. cit.

² Lord Auckland to the Secret Committee, 13 August 1838. Op. cit.

strange and tragic drama is the manner in which during the course of the summer of 1838 the role of leading actor was transferred from the shoulders of Ranjit Singh to those of Lord Auckland. In May, as we have seen, it was the Sikhs who were to supply the striking force ; by August Lord Auckland had determined

to give the direct and powerful assistance of the British Government to the enterprise of Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, in a degree which was not in the first instance contemplated by me, from a conviction, confirmed in the most decided manner by every opinion of authority on the subject, that the measure could not be trusted mainly to the support of the Sikh ruler and army without imminent hazard of failure, and of serious detriment to the reputation of the British name among the Afghan people.¹

Some historians of this period have assigned the responsibility for this decision to an ill-informed body of young advisers who now surrounded the Governor-General amid the misty aloofness of the Simla hills ; others have insisted that Lord Auckland was tied by his instructions from the Secret Committee and could have taken no other course.

Neither of these explanations is entirely satisfactory. The holder of the great office of Governor-General of India had to rely for his success mainly on the quality of the advice he received, and this depended on the quality of the men he chose to advise him. It was his responsibility to select the right men ; no one could divest him of this responsibility and by his choice he had to stand or fall. Similarly in Lord Auckland's case it was his responsibility to choose from among the various courses suggested to him by the Court of Directors ; no one at six months' distance from the scene of action could dictate the course to be followed in the circumstances obtaining in India in the summer of 1838. The final choice had to be left to the Governor-General.²

It is true that the Court of Directors approved his actions, though at times with some misgivings. But this was due partly to the time lag which inclines a superior naturally to approve the action of a trusted subordinate which he knows is already

¹ Lord Auckland to the Secret Committee, 13 August 1838. Op. cit.

² Cf. this extract of a letter from Mr. Colvin to the Resident in Gwalior, dated 20 August 1838 : 'The measures to meet it [the crisis] are entirely Lord Auckland's own. . . . Lord Auckland is acting on this side for himself. . . .' *Auckland Papers*; British Museum Add. MSS.

in train, and partly to a curious quality about the actions of the Government of India during this period. They were in fact groping their way forward amid a fog of uncertainty. Each step they took was the logical outcome of the previous one, but was taken with little or no idea of where it was leading or what the next step should be. We may consider that they were steps taken by a man who may have been a good administrator but who possessed nothing of the vision required of a statesman, and who was advised by men who lacked that peculiar quality of 'political sense' to instruct their actions. Or we may be more charitable. We may say, as we look back along the pages of history at the great movements of nations which connect the first attempt of the British to reach the Hindu Kush with all that has preceded and followed it, that here was just an incident, a paragraph on a page of history, here was just another of the conquerors striving to master that problem of India's security which had baffled so many of his predecessors. There is a fate about this restless frontier which has been too strong for mankind ever since the days when the Greek rulers of Bactria died fighting in face of the invading nomads till now when we have handed over the problem still unsolved to the Pathan races of the Hindu Kush. The First Afghan War was only a brief incident in this long story, and Lord Auckland might well plead that if he failed he failed in good company, and at the hands of a destiny which was too strong for men. He was certainly not the only Governor-General to be badly served by his advisers in dealing with the problems of Afghanistan, and he had to contend, as his successors had not, with all the additional hazards which encompass the pioneer.

At any rate, whatever may have been the real cause underlying Lord Auckland's decisions, the Secret Committee approved them. If then we examine the successive stages of the Governor-General's plan as evolved between May and August 1838 we find that his final decision to use a British force to remove one Afghan ruler and replace him by another was a logical and indeed inevitable decision. Once it had been decreed that Dost Muhammad must go, the only people capable of carrying out the decision were the British. The Sikhs could never have done it, even if they had had the heart for the venture.

Having come to this decision the Governor-General felt the necessity for justifying his actions. On 1 October 1838 there

appeared a manifesto over the signature of William Macnaghten, Secretary to the Government of India, setting forth the steps which led up to the decisions now reached. It is a plausible document, and all we need say of it is that the facts were not as the Governor-General thought they were. The prime motive for the whole expedition is contained in the following sentence :

The welfare of our possessions in the East requires that we should have on our western frontier an ally who is interested in resisting aggression, and establishing tranquillity, in the place of chiefs ranging themselves in subservience to a hostile power, and seeking to promote schemes of conquest and aggrandizement.¹

Within a few days of the issue of this manifesto news reached Simla that the siege of Herat had been raised. Many critics of Lord Auckland are aghast that he did not at once cancel the expedition. But in being so they forget that his venture was not primarily for the purpose of relieving Herat, its main purpose was to remove Dost Muhammad. The bureaucratic logic of the orders which issued a month later make this quite clear.

The Governor-General deems it proper . . . to notify that while he regards the relinquishment by the Shah of Persia of his hostile designs upon Herat as a just cause of congratulation . . . he will continue to prosecute with vigour the measures which have been announced, with a view to the substitution of a friendly for a hostile power in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan. . . .²

And so one month later the first attempt of the British to dominate the Hindu Kush was launched.

I do not propose to describe in any detail the various phases of the First Afghan War. These have been fully recorded, so far as they are known, by contemporary writers,³ to whose narratives there are now no fresh incidents to add. If they seem biased against the principal actors in the story, this is due mainly to the damning quality of the evidence, and partly to the fact that the man more responsible than any other for the policy and for its execution, Sir William Macnaghten, did not live to tell his side of the story, or to attempt to justify his actions.

¹ Declaration on the part of the Rt. Hon. the Governor-General of India, Simla, 1 October 1838.

² Order by the Rt. Hon. the Governor-General of India, 8 November 1838.

³ e.g. Sir William Kaye, *History of the War in Afghanistan*.

The British forces designed to support Shuh Shuja's re-entry into his country set out from Ferozpur in the Panjab in December 1838 after being reviewed by Lord Auckland and the Maharajah Ranjit Singh. This was the first and only meeting between these two men, as Ranjit Singh died six months later. A shrewd eyewitness of the meeting has described the Maharajah as

exactly like an old mouse, with grey whiskers and one eye . . . a very drunken old profligate, neither more nor less. Still he has made himself a great King ; he has conquered a great many powerful enemies ; he is remarkably just in his Government ; he has disciplined a large army ; he hardly ever takes away life which is wonderful in a despot ; and he is excessively beloved by his people. I certainly should not guess any part of this from looking at him.¹

And so the cunning old mouse sat beside Lord Auckland and watched the British forces set forth on their great adventure, and maybe he murmured to himself as he saluted the marching columns : ' There but for the grace of God go the armies of the Khalsa ! '

By April 1839 the invaders had reached Quetta, where they were joined by a contingent from Bombay, and by the force known as the Shah's army which had been especially recruited for Shah Shuja's service. Meanwhile in Afghanistan Dost Muhammad had incurred much odium from his negotiations with the Russians, while Kohendil Khan, deprived of all support from the west after the Persian withdrawal from Herat, fled from Qandahar leaving the city open to Shah Shuja and his British allies, who marched in unopposed at the end of April 1839.

The first step had been successfully taken. Shah Shuja was back in his own country and in possession of one of its principal cities. There had been no resistance and everything was going according to plan, except for the fearful wastage of camel transport on the line of march.

It took two months to collect more transport and then the army moved northwards through the shimmering heat of June, up the long and well-beaten tracks which lead by the barren slopes of Khelat-i-Ghilzai and on across the plain of Mukkur to Ghazni, and then over the watershed into the Kabul Valley. They reached Ghazni in three weeks and prepared immediately

¹ The Hon. Emily Eden, *Up the Country*.

to attack this famous fortress, perched high on a rock above the city overlooking the plain which stretches away eastward to India. They took it by assault after blowing in the main gate with gunpowder, and the reverberations of this swift blow struck Dost Muhammad with dismay. He and all Afghans believed the great fortress to be impregnable.

He sent his brother to treat with Shah Shuja while he himself moved out to defend his capital. But the mission to the British camp was fruitless, while on the Arghandeh Kotal, guarding the approaches to Kabul, Dost Muhammad found himself surrounded by treachery and dissension. When he realized that there was scarcely a man on whom he could rely he dismissed all who were inclined to purchase safety by tendering allegiance to Shah Shuja, and with a few followers turned northwards into the mountains of the Hindu Kush. Before the pursuit party could come up with him he had crossed the frontier of his dominion over the main ridge by Bamiyan. On 6 August 1839 Shah Shuja re-entered Kabul after an exile of thirty years.

So far the expedition had proved an unqualified success or nearly so. Shah Shuja had been replaced on his throne and little or no resistance had been offered. It appeared that the Afghan people acquiesced in, if they did not wholly welcome, his return. Thus far Burnes had proved a true prophet, and the country was sufficiently calm to permit of the speedy return of a portion of the British forces. The remainder to the amount of about one division, augmented by a small force supplied by the Sikh Durbar, were dispersed to form the garrisons of Jalalabad, Ghazni, and Qandahar in addition to Kabul, while the threat to Shah Shuja's security implied by Dost Muhammad's presence in the north was met by the dispatch of a small contingent to Bamiyan to watch the passes over the main ridge. For the first and last time in history the British were in actual physical occupation of the great north-western frontier of their dominions.

But as we look back now after a hundred years on this strange and tragic story we cannot but be amazed, not so much at the folly of those who committed so many British lives and so much British prestige to such fearful hazards, as at the calm assumption by all concerned that the whole project was moving towards a successful conclusion. By all save a few. There were some critics in England, like the Duke of Wellington, who prophesied

that our difficulties would begin where our military successes ended, and there were others nearer at hand who as the clouds darkened over Kabul in the summer of 1841 warned the envoy of the approaching storm. But Sir William Macnaghten was proof against all warnings. He had pinned his faith on a certain line of policy and with that unswerving rigidity which is typical of the bureaucratic mind he adhered to this policy long after it had proved itself unworkable. There could be no compromise ; that the Afghan people should accept Shah Shuja as their rightful ruler was the intention of the British Government, and in the envoy's mind this intention swiftly became an accomplished fact, against all evidence to the contrary. One can only imagine that having spent so much of his service in the province of Bengal Macnaghten had come to think that the temperament of all Asiatics was cast in a similar mould, and confounded the pliant submission of the Bengali Babu with the deferential but implacable hostility of the Afghan chieftains.

The British in Afghanistan took their cue from their leaders. After they had spent an uncomfortable winter in temporary quarters, the great fortress of the Bala Hisar which dominates Kabul city was prepared for their occupation. But Shah Shuja objected on the grounds that the Bala Hisar overlooked not only the city but his palace. Macnaghten, torn between the desire to secure the British position in Kabul and unwillingness to take any step which would appear to indicate permanent occupation, accepted Shah Shuja's objections, and the army was moved in August 1840 to a great cantonment situated on the open ground to the north-east of the city.¹ Here the British settled down to what looked very like a permanent occupation. Lady Macnaghten and other wives joined their husbands. Houses were built for their accommodation, furniture and other necessities of life were imported from India. The British ruled as in India with justice and impartiality but also with the assurance of masters and a careless disregard for the feelings of the Afghan chiefs whose country they had overrun. They led their own lives, played

¹ Afterwards known as the ' Folly on the Plain '. A sketch of it by Lt. James Rattray of the Bengal Army shows a great straggling collection of barracks and officers' quarters with buildings of the Mission attached at the north end, the whole being surrounded by a ' diminutive line of rampart ', and ' commanded at all parts by hills, forts or other buildings '. It occupied an area to the east of the old Kohistan road just opposite the present aerodrome. Its outline can still be seen from the air.

cricket in summer and skated in winter, shot and fished and held race meetings as they pleased and as in their own country. The Afghans, always great lovers of sport in all its forms, were not unimpressed, but there was one factor in their social relations which undid all the good such opportunities for intercourse might have engendered. This was the traffic in women which went on between the city and the cantonment. We who live in a sadder but more realistic world know now that military discipline does not by any means cover private morality and that, if some thousands of young men are herded together in a foreign country with nothing but bare military routine to occupy their minds, they will undoubtedly seek female society in some form or other, if such is to be had.¹ But in the mid-Victorian age such facts were ignored if possible,² or if not were condemned without mercy or understanding. Many writers have emphasized the harm this intercourse did to our relations with the Afghans, and there is no doubt of the truth of this assertion in a country where outwardly at any rate the honour of their women is of fanatical importance. But the old proverb, 'necessity is the mother of invention and the father of the Eurasian', applied in 1840 with the same force in Afghanistan as it did in India.

While in Kabul the year 1840 passed in comparative calm, British relations with the Sikhs deteriorated swiftly after the death of Ranjit Singh. So bad in fact did they become that Macnaghten pressed the Governor-General though without effect to cause the restoration of Peshawar and the country on the right bank of the Indus to Shah Shuja. Such a step, which two years before had been the main stumbling-block between the Government of India and Dost Muhammad, now appeared to the envoy as essential to the consolidation of Shah Shuja's power.

But this was not the only instance which showed that Macnaghten realized, as others have done since his time, in how different a guise the same problems may appear when viewed from Simla and from Kabul. In the autumn of 1840 Dost Muhammad recrossed the Hindu Kush and after some skirmishing round Bamiyan appeared in the Kohistan some forty miles north

¹ Cf. the allegations, many of them much exaggerated, against the Polish Army in Scotland, 1940-6.

² The spirit of this age is well exemplified in the term 'inexpressibles' for men's nether garments, and in the convention that the Queen of Spain had no legs!

of Kabul. Sir Robert Sale was sent out to deal with him, while in the capital disaffection was rife and there was talk of concentrating in the Bala Hisar to withstand a siege.

But Dost Muhammad had shot his bolt. He was brought to bay in the hills around Nijrao and at the outset of an indecisive action he charged and routed a contingent of Indian cavalry. For a moment he sat on his horse facing the British line, and then as though realizing that he could no longer maintain the struggle against the might of Britain he turned and drew off his men. From the field of Parwandarraha he rode that day directly to the British envoy's camp and gave himself up to the representative of the Government which had so greatly wronged him. He and his family were treated with every courtesy and sent into honourable exile in India. And two months later Macnaghten in a letter, urging that he should be treated with kindness, wrote, ' . . . we ejected the Dost who never offended us, in support of our policy of which he was the victim ! '

But in spite of the disappearance of their principal opponent the British and Shah Shuja seemed to get no nearer a pacification of the country. Shah Shuja chafed against the restraints placed on his authority, while the British who ruled in his name found themselves saddled with the responsibility for the acts of his agents. The combination was unworkable and the wonder is not that in the end the system under which the country was governed failed but that it lasted as long as it did.

By the spring of 1841 the cost of the continued occupation of Afghanistan was causing much anxiety in Calcutta and London. Retrenchment was imperative and this was carried out by reducing the garrison in Kabul and by cutting the subsidies paid to the chiefs. The eastern Ghilzais at once revolted and Sale's brigade, returning to India, had to fight its way through to Jalalabad.

In Kabul and in the neighbouring districts disaffection was spreading. The first manifestation of a determination to get rid of the foreigner occurred in November when the rebellious chiefs attacked the house of Alexander Burnes situated within the city limits in the Shor Bazar. After a brief resistance Burnes, who was shortly to have succeeded Macnaghten, and his companions were massacred and their house destroyed. This was the moment, at the very outset of the insurrection, when swift and decisive action to restore order was imperative. But fate had

ordained that the command of the doomed Kabul garrison should have been placed in the hands of the very worst possible man to exercise it. General Elphinstone, who was selected for command by the strangely ill-starred Lord Auckland, had fought well at Waterloo, twenty-seven years earlier, but now, infirm in mind and body and ignorant of the country or people with which he was dealing, he was faced with a crisis requiring speed, decision, and leadership, in all of which qualities he was deficient. On that critical day, 2 November, he wrote to Macnaghten: ' . . . We must see what the morning brings, and then think what can be done. . . .' The mornings from now onwards were to bring nothing but disaster.

A few days later the commissariat fort, situated by some astounding mischance outside the cantonment, fell into the enemy's hands and the army was soon on the verge of starvation; while in the middle of the month Pottinger, who after his gallant defence of Herat had been put in charge of the Kohistan Valley near Kabul, reached the cantonment with one desperately wounded companion to tell the story of the defence of Charikar of which they were the sole survivors. The enemy now greatly reinforced and encouraged were swarming through the city and on to the Bemaru heights and threatening the cantonment. On 23 November an attempt was made to dislodge them. But the effort was half-hearted and after a bitter struggle the British were driven back off the ridge. 'This action', states Brigadier Shelton in his report, 'concluded all exterior operations.'

From this time onwards no further will to fight remained either with the leader or the troops. The intense cold, lack of fuel and provisions, and above all lack of leadership numbed the minds and courage of a force which, however small, still had the power, if it had the will, either to enter the Bala Hisar or to carry out a fighting retreat to Jalalabad. But the will was lacking. Macnaghten alone among those in command strove against apathy and defeatism. His conduct during these two last months of his life showed him to possess both courage and resource. But his sanguine temperament carried him too far and blinded him to the facts. Instead of admitting that the situation was now desperate and bending all his energies to rescuing the army from its immediate danger, he clung to the hope that something might turn up to save the policy with which he

was so closely identified, until it was too late to save anything at all.

He tried one desperate expedient after another until on 23 December he was treacherously murdered by Muhammad Akbar, son of Dost Muhammad, at a conference assembled only some 500 yards from the cantonment to discuss terms of peace. A week later terms of evacuation were signed, which provided for the withdrawal of the British forces under safe conduct from Afghanistan. This treaty was ratified by eighteen Afghan chiefs.

On 6 January the British force began its march to India. The weather was bitterly cold and the country deep in snow. The army of 4,500 fighting men was encumbered by an immense quantity of baggage and military stores, by sick and wounded, by a number of women and children, and by 12,000 panic-stricken camp followers. Fuel and provisions were lacking and the Afghan escort, intended to restrain the savagery of the fanatical Ghazis, had not appeared when the advance guard moved off. Shortly after leaving the cantonment they passed within a few hundred yards of the great fortress of the Bala Hisar where they might have found shelter and security for the winter, and from whose walls Shah Shuja watched them pass, realizing as he did so that both his own and their days were numbered. But they turned their backs on the Bala Hisar and safety and straggled across the great plain which leads gradually up to the Khurd-Kabul defile some twenty miles away. Already they were beset on all sides by the Ghazis and by nightfall the advance guard had only reached Bagrami, five miles from the city, while the rearguard had not yet left the cantonment. On the 7th they camped at Bhutkak some six miles further on and halted for one day in the piercing cold while the Ghilzais gathered in the defiles of the Khurd-Kabul, and the Afghan chiefs made ineffectual efforts to restrain the fury of their countrymen. In front of them to the east lay the direct road to Jalalabad by the Lataband Pass, but the Afghans insisted they should take the longer route by the Tezin Valley. On the 9th the army entered the Khurd-Kabul Pass and for three miles forced its way up the narrow path, attacked on all sides by thousands of Afghans who poured a deadly fire from every rock and cliff on the struggling mass below.

That evening Pottinger, who as one of the hostages accompanied Muhammad Akbar at some distance from the army,

arranged that the women and children with their husbands should join him under the comparative safety of an Afghan escort. On the following day the surviving sepoy of the native regiments deserted, and the British troops, still encumbered by a desperate band of camp followers, pushed on through another defile which leads on to the high snow-bound uplands overlooking the Tezin Valley.¹ When they reached the summit some 450 men were left with perhaps 3,000 camp followers. Neither baggage nor stores and only one horse artillery gun remained.² Complete disarmament and surrender was then demanded as the price of safety, and was instantly refused. At Brigadier Shelton's suggestion an attempt was made to force their way through to the Jagdalak Pass by night, but, hampered by the camp followers, dawn found them a few miles short of the pass. Here, worn out by incessant marching and fighting and lack of food, they halted for two days, and here General Elphinstone and Brigadier Shelton, who had been invited to a conference with Muhammad Akbar, were detained as hostages for the evacuation of Jalalabad. On the evening of 12 January the remnant of the force, now reduced to a few officers, about 120 infantry and some 25 men of the horse artillery, who alone maintained cohesion and discipline throughout the march, attempted to cross the Jagdalak Pass under cover of darkness. But a barrier had been erected in the defile at the summit and here the final stand was made. A few officers and men struggled on to the hill of Gandamak overlooking the plain, where they were surrounded and massacred, and a party of six mounted officers reached Fatehabad, some twelve miles from Jalalabad. But they were weak after seven days of desperate fighting with neither sleep nor food, and every man's hand was against them. Only one, Dr. Brydon, got through to Jalalabad to tell the tale to Sale's brigade.

And thus in bloodshed and disaster ended the first attempt of

¹ The Kabul-Jagdalak road crosses at high altitude some of the most desolate country in Afghanistan. In January the wind on the Haft Kotal Pass will fill the roadway with snow to a depth of four feet within an hour of the snow plough passing.

² One is reminded of the description of another march which took place some twenty years later—

'You could mark the path that they took
By the dead that they left behind

Spilt on that fatal march as a cart spills meal on a road. . . .'

Stephen Vincent Benét, describing the charge of the Virginians at Gettysburg.

the British to gain control of the Hindu Kush. It is true that in the autumn of 1842 British forces re-entered Kabul from both Peshawar and Qandahar, burnt the great bazar as a mark of retribution¹ and rescued the British prisoners from Bamiyan. But after restoring British prestige, in their own estimation at any rate, the British quitted the country and allowed Dost Muhammad to resume his interrupted reign, Shah Shuja having been murdered in the preceding spring. They restored, so far as in them lay, the *status quo*, but they could not restore what they had utterly destroyed, Afghan faith in British justice and fair dealing. Nearly a hundred years were to pass before that faith could be built anew on fresh foundations.

On the other side this unjust invasion of their country put a strain on Afghan integrity to which it was not equal, and earned for the Afghans a reputation for treachery which they hardly deserved. Although no one would wish to compare German with British rule over conquered peoples, we who in the past few years have applauded and encouraged the deeds of the Maquis in France are not so prone as were our Victorian forebears to condemn those who seek to rid themselves of foreign rule by any and every means in their power. Although the Pathan code of honour differs from ours, the rulers of Afghanistan were and are men of a high integrity and honour in all normal peaceful dealings. But in war all methods to rid himself of an invader are fair to an Afghan, and I am by no means certain that if these islands were ever invaded we should not be of the same mind.

¹ An eyewitness after describing the magnificence of the Kabul bazar continues: 'A few months rolled on and I again entered this mighty city. Great changes and terrible had taken place . . . none of my former friends received me as before. Razed houses and blackened walls . . . met my view. No one appeared. . . . They fled and evacuated the city on our approach.' Lt. J. Rattray, *Sketches in Afghanistan*.

Chapter VII

THE 'GREAT GAME' CONTINUED— THE STRUGGLE FOR THE HINDU KUSH

(1842-1875)

IN the autumn of 1842 the British armies returned from Afghanistan, and all that they left behind of the work of the previous four years were the ruined bazars, the skeletons piled high in the grim Khurd-Kabul Pass, and 'a wound that rankled for fifty years!'—aye, and more than fifty years. It has never quite been healed.

Lord Ellenborough came down to Ferozpur to welcome Sale's brigade—'The Illustrious Garrison' which had held Jalalabad—and the rest of the British forces, and to issue the fatuous proclamation about the gates of Somnath which we have already noted.¹ A month later, in January 1843, Dost Muhammad, passing through Lahore on his journey back to Kabul, was honourably received and set on his way by the Sikh Durbar. He resumed his interrupted reign, but without the presence of Ranjit Singh to dominate the stage of the northern Panjab, and with sadder and wiser men in the Government of India than those who had lightly embarked on their Central Asian venture so short a time before.

But as we look back on this period in the story of the Hindu Kush we can see that so great an upheaval as the First Afghan War could not pass and die down and disappear leaving no trace behind. The ripples of that most disastrous adventure spread far and wide till they infected every Afghan all along the miles of frontier from the Pamirs to the Persian desert with a suspicion and instinctive dislike of Europeans and their ways, so strong as to prevent closer contacts for many vital years to come. They spread into India and into the hearts of many a sepoy of the Bengal army, who learnt for the first time that his British masters were not invincible. And they spread far across Asia and Europe

¹ See Pt. I, Ch. III.

till they echoed in St. Petersburg, where the counsellors of the Tsar advised their master that the British were pushing on towards the markets of Samarqand and Tashkent and the great cities of Transoxiana, and that he had better see to it that he was not forestalled.

On the British side considerations of expediency tended to obscure the fundamental issues and to lead men like Canning and Lawrence and others who ruled India in the fifties to abjure the idea of closer connexion with the Afghans, and to discuss the advisability of a withdrawal of the British frontiers to the Indus. But an influence stronger than men was drawing the two great Empires forward, the irresistible impulses of commercial expansion and imperial strategy always latent in the minds of conquering races and now set in motion by the repercussions of the First Afghan War.

Already in 1839 the Russians, foiled in their first attempt to extend their influence to Herat, had responded to the British advance into Central Asia by sending out from Orenberg an expedition against Khiva. The ostensible reason for this move, as given in a Russian state paper, was the threat to caravans traversing the desert north of Khiva of the depredations of the Khirghiz Cossacks, who in addition were carrying off many thousands of Russian subjects as slaves to Khiva. The reason was adequate enough without the spur of British commercial rivalry to urge them on, but the Russians failed. The expedition set out from Orenberg at the wrong time of year and got caught in the terrible ice-storms of the Ust Urt desert north of Khiva. Only a remnant managed to struggle back to Orenberg. Two years later a treaty of peace and alliance was signed between the Russians and the new ruler of Khiva, but his failure in the field brought home to the Russian Governor, Perofski, that Orenberg was ill-situated as a base for further operations, and that a forward move to the Sea of Aral was essential if commerce was to receive adequate protection.

While, therefore, in the 1840s Perofski and his Russians were preparing for their next move southwards from Orenberg, 2,000 miles away in northern India the British were resuming their steady march to the north-west. It is unnecessary for our purposes to enter into any detailed survey of the reasons which led up to the annexation of Sind and of the Panjab which took

place between 1843 and 1849. The former was looked on at the time as a 'good, honest, useful piece of rascality'. The annexation of the Panjab was the inevitable outcome of the conditions bordering on anarchy which followed the death of Ranjit Singh. In both cases the fundamental underlying cause was the juxtaposition of stability and instability, of ordered government and of misrule; the Empire pushing on in its search for a frontier and finding no halting place, no physical or man-made barrier, on which its outposts could be aligned and behind which its nationals could move in freedom and safety. It is possible that if the Sikhs had not crossed the Indus we might have tried to found a stable frontier on the eastern banks of that great river, when we took over from them the control of their country. But if the Sikhs had not crossed the Indus there would have been no Afghan War and the whole course of frontier history would have been different. We followed them across the Indus and took over the trans-Indus territories up to the foothills of tribal territory.

This lawless country accepted the rule of such men as Jacob in Sind, John Lawrence in the Panjab, and Herbert Edwardes in Peshawar, and for a while these men had little time for any thoughts on external policy. But not for long. By 1854 Edwardes, backed by the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, though not by his immediate chief, John Lawrence, was throwing out feelers for a resumption of relations with Dost Muhammad.

Eleven years had passed since Dost Muhammad had returned to Kabul and in this time we had had few dealings with him. In 1848 he had been forced by popular clamour to join his former enemies, the Sikhs, against the British and take part with them in the battle of Gujrat from which he barely escaped with his life. Since then the general state of relations between the Government of India and Dost Muhammad had been one of 'sullen quiescence on either side, without offence but without goodwill or intercourse'.¹

In the spring of 1854, however, the Crimean War was about to break out. Lord Dalhousie, although he saw no immediate threat to India from Russian movements, thought it would be wise on our part to leave nothing undone 'which would tend to make Afghanistan an effectual barrier against Russian aggression,

¹ Lord Dalhousie's Minute of 14 March 1854.

or which would encourage and induce the Afghan tribes to make common cause with us against an enemy whose success would be fatal to the common interests of both Afghan and British power'.¹ Thus once more the far-off menace of Russia, so far off as to be almost imperceptible, brought the Afghans into the orbit of British diplomacy. The approaches were tentative and non-committal. The Amir, who had learnt much during his Indian exile of British ways and British power, was disposed to forget the past, if the British would do the same, and to ally himself with them as a counter to Russian pressure and Persian assertions of paramountcy. John Lawrence in Lahore was lukewarm about the whole business and left the negotiations largely in Edwardes's hands, but came up to Peshawar in March 1855 to meet the Amir's envoy, his son Ghulam Haider, at the mouth of the Khyber Pass and convey him to Peshawar, where a treaty² of three clauses was signed. This treaty did little more than reopen diplomatic relations, but it gave assurances that we had no aggressive intentions against the integrity of Afghanistan, and on the other side it pledged the Amir to be 'the friend of the friends and enemy of the enemies of the Honourable East India Company'.

Two years later that much-contested city of Herat once more comes into the picture. A long course of studied provocation by the Persians culminated in October 1856 in their seizure of the city. The British whose 'avowed' and very unpractical policy had been to maintain the independence of this miserable little principality 'as an important element in the defence of British India against the possible machinations of Russia',³ promptly treated the seizure of Herat as a *casus belli* and declared war on Persia. The war lasted for three months, and at the end of it Persia agreed to withdraw from Herat and never again to attempt to interfere with the independence of Herat and Afghanistan.⁴

But this brief campaign had a very important effect on British relations with Dost Muhammad. In order to strengthen his hand in his opposition to possible Persian aggression and to

¹ Ibid.

² *Aitchison's Treaties*. Vol. XIII, No. IV (Afghanistan), signed at Peshawar, 30 March 1855.

³ Secret Committee to the Government of India, 22 March 1856.

⁴ *Aitchison's Treaties*. Vol. XIII, No. XVIII (Persia), signed at Paris on 4 March 1857.

ensure co-operation, the Amir himself was invited to Peshawar where a supplement to the previous treaty was negotiated and signed, Lawrence and Edwardes again acting for the Government of India. By this agreement the Amir was to receive a lakh of rupees (£10,000) a month during the war with Persia. For this he was to maintain a sufficient body of troops to defend his possessions and to permit British officers to proceed to either Kabul, Qandahar, or Balkh to see that the subsidy was properly administered.¹ The Amir and his advisers, with the memories of 1842 still fresh in their minds, strongly argued against the deputation of British officers to Kabul, 'the focus of bigotry and the hotbed of intrigue'. In deference to their wishes it was agreed that European officers should not for the present go to Kabul, and the mission under Major H. B. Lumsden proceeded accordingly to Qandahar, where they spent the year of the Mutiny in some danger and discomfort without being permitted to carry out their appointed task with any effect.

But this visit of the Amir to Peshawar in January 1857 was to have most important results. It is curious how often in the handling of public affairs the value of personal contact is ignored or discounted. There is, particularly in bureaucratic government, a strong and, I fear, growing tendency to put the handling of 'things' on a higher level than the handling of 'people', and to believe that if a case can be proved on paper the resulting decision must inevitably carry conviction to the minds of those who read it. This fallacy has been the cause of many troubles in the past, and particularly perhaps in dealings between the East and West. The value of personal contact in oriental diplomacy is of first importance, and among Orientals it is nowhere more important than in dealing with Afghans. In 1857 our relations with the Afghan Government were most delicate. They were anxious for our support, but ready to shy off at any suggestion of interference in their internal affairs. In such an atmosphere Dost Muhammad came down to Peshawar, to the Pathan city which he had so greatly coveted, and there seated among his late bitter enemies negotiated and signed a most friendly agreement. He did not get all that he asked for, but he met and talked with two great Englishmen, John Lawrence and

¹ *Aitchison's Treaties*. Vol. XIII, No. V (Afghanistan), signed at Peshawar on 26 January 1857.

Herbert Edwardes, and as he signed the document he exclaimed : ' I have now made an alliance with the British Government and come what may I will keep it till death.'¹

The Amir kept his word. His constancy, in the face of the very greatest temptation, saved India in the grim summer of 1857 when Lawrence was sending every man he could spare to Delhi, and Edwardes held the frontier by sheer force of character and power of leadership. A word from Dost Muhammad would have sent the tribes pouring down in a wave of fanatical irredentism to overrun and possess again the rich valleys of Peshawar and the Derajat. But that word was not spoken.²

We may pause here for a moment to consider an interesting point which will recur more than once in the story of our relations with the Afghans. We have seen how in those four unhappy years, from 1838 to 1842, these relations changed from cordiality to hatred on their side, and to a deep-rooted conviction on our side that an Afghan was a man of treachery and double dealing whose word could never be relied on. This conviction, which was formed in the stress of war, has persisted in the years of peace even up to most recent days. And yet it is not true.

I do not intend to whitewash the Afghan character or to pretend that there have not been forsworn and faithless men among them as there have been among the people of all nations. Nor do I suggest that in so primitive and illiterate a people the code of private morality is very high.

But among their rulers and particularly among the descendants of Pinda Khan, the Barakzais, we find a standard of honour and integrity which has rendered many of them worthy of the highest trust and confidence. In some respects it differs from our standards ; in small matters it is less rigid, and it is sometimes exasperatingly practical. One of the greatest of the Barakzais once observed that he went on the principle of doing to others, not as he would wish them to do unto him, but as they actually had done unto him ; there was in fact in their code no

¹ Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, Vol. I, Ch. XV.

² Cf. Major Lumsden's Diary from Qandahar, 2 July 1857 : ' We ought indeed to be grateful to Providence for having permitted our relations with Afghanistan to be so successfully arranged before the arrival of this crisis, for I am convinced that, had it not been that the minds of the Afghans were in a measure prepared for the Amir's non-interference, he could not have prevented a general rush down the passes, which must have added greatly to our embarrassment at Peshawar and along the frontier.'

suggestion of turning the other cheek to the smiter; far from it.

But in the great crises which have arisen from time to time in the chequered history of British-Afghan relations, the rulers of Afghanistan have kept their word and often in most difficult circumstances have carried out their undertakings to the best of their ability. Dost Muhammad was the first but by no means the last of the rulers of Afghanistan to prove that beneath all their outward waywardness and fickle character there abides among the great Durrani leaders a core of integrity and constancy of purpose, which has more than once stood their neighbours in good stead.

The Agreement of 1857 inspired the Governor-General, Lord Canning, to record a Minute setting forth at length his views on Afghan policy.¹ It is an interesting document containing a concise and logical pronouncement on policy, which had it been followed consistently might have saved some, at any rate, of the troubles which were to follow. Lord Canning emphasized his conviction that in no circumstances which he could then foresee should we again interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, or send an army across her eastern frontiers, except for such a purpose as to rescue Herat from the Persians, and then only with the consent of the Afghans themselves. He went on to adduce strong arguments in favour of the absorption of Herat by Afghanistan, which though it drew no response from the British Government at the time, may perhaps have influenced them in acquiescing in its subsequent capture by Dost Muhammad.

In a letter to Captain (afterwards Lt.-General Sir Harry) Lumsden written about the same time the Governor-General reiterated his attitude towards Afghan affairs.

. . . you cannot impress too strongly upon every man you meet [he wrote] that the British Government does not desire to send into Afghanistan a single man, armed or unarmed, except with the full consent of the Afghans themselves. . . . Endeavour to convince them of the truth, that what we most desire is that they would govern themselves and defend themselves after their own fashion without any thought from us, and that in return for contributing to their defence we ask for nothing but confidence in ourselves and their resistance to the common enemy.

¹ Minute dated 6 February 1857, enclosed in Secret letter 11, D/y 21 February 1857, India Office Records.

This policy of non-interference was at the time both expedient and logical. It was developed at a later date into the policy of 'masterly inactivity', and as we shall see produced reactions which finally destroyed it.

So far as Dost Muhammad was concerned it was a policy which enabled him to restore a large measure of tranquillity to his country, and to resume control of its outlying portions, until Afghan dominion once more extended to the Oxus and westwards into Sistan. The capture of Herat in 1863, a few months before his death, put the seal of success upon his efforts.

A contemporary description of the 'Great Amir.' shows that he was

. . . tall, of fine physical development, and he truly looked a King His manner was courteous while his keen eyes and vigorous conversation conveyed the idea of great determination combined with astuteness and appreciation of humour . . . he called a spade a spade.¹

His career shows him to have been a notable administrator and a great gentleman whose memory is cherished among the Afghan people, so that even to-day the saying is remembered: 'Is Dost Muhammad dead that there is now no justice in the land?'

The succession passed to the Amir's third son, Sher Ali, whom he himself had chosen but who at the outset had to face the strenuous rivalry of his many brothers, and particularly of the eldest, Muhammad Afzal Khan, who for a short time occupied Kabul where he was proclaimed Amir. His success was mainly due to the generalship of his son, Abdur Rahman, of whom we shall hear more in due course, but two years later Sher Ali was able to advance from Herat, where he had taken refuge. By 1868 he had defeated his rivals and re-entered Kabul, while Abdur Rahman took refuge across the Oxus, there to await better times.

In the meantime a vital change had come over the Central Asian scene. In 1842 the Russian frontier was still beyond the Sea of Aral, but as we have seen the impulse to forestall the British in Central Asian markets and at the same time to protect Russian trade led to the first step in the great forward movement which in the next thirty years was to carry their influence to the Oxus. By 1847 Russian advanced posts had been pushed forward to

¹ General Sir Peter Lumsden, *Lumsden of the Guides*.

command the lower reaches of the Sri Darya. This advance led to immediate reprisals by the Khan of Khoqand, who claimed ownership of the whole river. This in turn led to a renewed



advance by the Russians, who in 1853 assumed control of the great waterway of the Sri Darya for a distance of 280 miles from its mouth. In the following year a Russian expedition penetrated eastwards into the valley of the Ili, with the result that the whole frontier area between the basins of the Ili and the

Sri Darya was in a ferment as the local tribesmen strove desperately to preserve their independence. The Crimean War temporarily arrested further progress, but by 1863 the frontier ran south-east along the line of the Sri Darya to Chimkent and then eastwards to the south of Lake Issik-Kul and to the Tien Shan Mountains.

Such an advance required some explanation. This was duly furnished in 1864 by the Russian Government in the form of a memorandum, written by the Russian Imperial Chancellor, Prince Gorchakov, and circulated through Russian representatives abroad, to the Governments to which they were accredited.¹ It is a remarkable document stating the case for expansion with moderation and clarity, so that the Russian advance through Asia is shown to be, as indeed in many respects it was, the inevitable outcome of progress and civilization. But unfortunately for the reputation of the Russian rulers as honest men, the memorandum does not pursue the argument to its logical conclusion. There was in Central Asia no natural or man-made boundary on which the frontiers of Imperial Russia could rest. In the nineteenth century only one thing could stop this great southern expansion before it reached the Hindu Kush or even the shores of the Indian Ocean—the upward thrust of some equally powerful empire, challenging and arresting the mighty steamroller of Russia.

It is, of course, obvious that Prince Gorchakov could not, even if he realized it, have made such an avowal in a state paper. At the same time it was unwise to enunciate so clearly in the first half of the memorandum the principles which had made the Russian advance inevitable, and then proceed to ignore these same principles by laying down 'with geographical precision the limits where interest and reason command us to stop'. This limit was the line then reached.

But Gorchakov ignored the fact that every step in such an advance begets the next through the bitter enmity it arouses, and the lust for further conquest it inspires. The forward impulse once set in motion is wellnigh uncontrollable, at any rate when the control is as remote as St. Petersburg was from Central Asia. Tashkent was the next to go. It was captured in June 1865 and though the Russians affirmed it to be the 'immutable policy' of the Tsar to respect its independence, the Khanate was in fact

¹ Appendix II.

formally annexed in 1865. Samarqand followed. A Russian mission sent to establish friendly relations with the remaining Khanates was arrested in Bukhara at the end of 1865. The pretext was sufficient; hostilities were at once opened, by 1868 the great historic and commercial centre of Samarqand was occupied and was shortly afterwards incorporated in the new Russian province of Turkestan of which General Kaufmann, one of the great administrators of Central Asia, was appointed Governor. Peace with the Ruler of Bukhara followed on terms which reduced him to the position of a vassal of the Imperial Government, with the result that by 1869, a year after Sher Ali had established his position in Kabul, Russian influence extended to the shores of the Oxus.

British policy was in the meantime slowly recovering from the shock of the First Afghan War. The *rapprochement* with Dost Muhammad of 1857 was not followed up. In the stress of the Mutiny John Lawrence went so far as to advocate the restoration of the trans-Indus territories to the Afghans, a proposal which was negatived in Lord Canning's dramatic telegram: 'Hold on to Peshawar to the last.' But Lawrence did not abandon this policy. In 1858, in supporting Lumsden's view that the best way to deal with the Afghans was to have as little to do with them as possible, he returned to the charge, basing his proposals for a withdrawal to the Indus on the grounds that this would remove our troops from positions deleterious to their health, would conciliate the Afghans and so strengthen our relations with them, and would in no way diminish the strength of our defensive positions, since the trans-Indus area could easily be reoccupied if it were ever advisable to do so as a military measure. Lawrence's opinions were based on his own convictions and were supported by the views of such men as Sir James Outram who, in a lengthy memorandum on the subject of the defence of India, had written that 'the natural and impregnable boundary of our Empire is the Indus'.¹

So drastic a change in the policy which had hitherto governed, though at times unconsciously, the steady advance of the British through India, produced its inevitable opponents. Already in 1854 Brigadier-General John Jacob in charge of the Sind border had advocated pushing forward the Indian frontier through the

¹ Minute of 8 February 1854.



THE HINDU KUSH FROM ISTALIF

Bolan Pass to Quetta in Baluchistan, so as to protect the left flank of India's north-west frontier against any possible advance into Afghanistan by Persia or Russia, and had foreshadowed an ultimate advance to Herat.

Thus began some ninety years ago the conflict which has raged ever since on the vital question of British political strategy along this great frontier of Empire. When it first opened the opposing views were drastic in the extreme: on the one side an advance to Quetta if not to Herat; on the other a retreat to the Indus or, if not, a policy of 'masterly inactivity' behind a closed border, and no dealings with Afghanistan. We will see how in the years which followed opinion wavered between the logical development of the forward policy and the many considerations of justice and expediency which forbade a further advance.

Lawrence's proposal to withdraw to the Indus found little support and was not pursued. But his policy of non-interference in Afghan affairs held the field till the close of his Viceroyalty in 1869. It was the extreme reaction to the policy of the thirties, and it involved the very difficult policy of refusing to take sides during the long internecine struggle between Sher Ali and his brothers for the Afghan throne. But Lawrence was quite clear on this point. 'Our relations should always be with the *de facto* ruler of the day, and so long as the *de facto* ruler is not unfriendly to us, we should always be prepared to renew with him the same terms and favourable conditions as obtained under his predecessor.'¹ Such a policy was assailed at the time and subsequently as setting a premium on anarchy and as playing into the hands of Russia, but in fact it did neither; and it served fifty years later as a pattern on which to frame a similar policy in dissimilar circumstances of internal strife.² In 1868 Sher Ali had to regain Kabul by his own efforts, but once he was re-established he found the Viceroy ready and willing to help him, with arms and money but with no more.

A few months after his return to Kabul Sher Ali came down to India to meet Lord Mayo, who had succeeded Sir John Lawrence in January 1869. It was a meeting which augured well for future relations. It gave an opportunity for the establishment

¹ Secret Dispatch No. 3, D/y 3 September 1867 from the Government of India.

² See Pt. II, Ch. XI (1).

of personal contact, so vital in dealing with an Afghan, and Lord Mayo made the most of it. Sher Ali did not get all he asked for, his request for a treaty of alliance was not agreed to, but he was given a letter from the Viceroy which assured him of the friendship and support of the British Government coupled with the hope that he would on his return home be able

to establish your legitimate rule over your entire Kingdom, to consolidate your power, to create a firm and merciful administration in every province of Afghanistan, to promote the interests of commerce, and to secure peace and tranquillity within all your borders.¹

This letter, which was accompanied by a present of two batteries of artillery and 10,000 stands of arms, and the cordiality of his reception made a profound impression on the Amir, as is shown by his reply : ' If it please God, as long as I am alive, or as long as my Government exists, the foundation of friendship and goodwill between this and the powerful British Government will not be weakened.'² Just on ten years later, on 21 February 1879, Amir Sher Ali died in Mazar-i-Sharif, a broken-hearted exile, while his erstwhile friends, the British, from their camp at Gandamak on the road to Kabul, concluded an illusory peace with his son, Yaqub Khan.

The story of what happened in between these dates to lead up to such a tragedy has its beginnings in the fatal legacy of the First Afghan War. Amir Sher Ali was a man who had many of the Durrani qualities of rulership, but lacked his father's stability and statesmanship. His character, though in no way deserving Lord Lytton's definition of a ' savage with a touch of insanity ', was difficult and unstable ; he required careful and patient handling and above all the personal touch which can be of such inestimable value in dealing with oriental, or indeed with any rulers. The personal link between Sher Ali and the British rulers of India was severed with the assassination of Lord Mayo in 1872, and the hatred and suspicion engendered by the First Afghan War made it impossible for Sher Ali to renew the connexion by receiving a British envoy in Kabul during those fateful years, from 1872 to 1878. Had such a move been possible the tragedy of the Second Afghan War might well have been averted,

¹ Letter dated 31 March 1869 from H.E. The Viceroy to H.H. The Amir.

² Letter dated 3 April 1869 from H.H. The Amir to H.E. The Viceroy.

as a similar impending tragedy was averted forty-five years later by the infinite patience and tactful though firm handling of a critical situation by the British Minister in Kabul.¹ But the legacy of 1839 was too fresh in the minds of the Afghan people to justify the Amir in risking what was to cost his successor the throne, and so the drama moved forward to its inevitable climax as one minor disagreement after another widened the breach between the two Governments, and the 'forward policy' once more held the field.

We have seen this policy already beginning to take shape in 1854. It was kept alive by Sir Bartle Frere, another exponent of the Sind school of thought, and received considerable impetus from a notable memorandum written in July 1868 by Sir Henry Rawlinson, who had served with distinction in Qandahar in the First Afghan War and afterwards in Persia. In this paper Rawlinson drew attention to the great and growing menace to India of the Russian advance to the Oxus, and particularly to the danger arising from her paramount position in Bukhara. The connexion between Kabul and Bukhara was very close indeed, and it was this circumstance alone 'which forces us into contact with Russia'. In developing this theme Rawlinson gave particular weight to the position of Russia on the Oxus as challenging British supremacy in Southern Asia, a challenge which could be implemented with deadly effect should tension in Europe over the Turkish question ever make it expedient for her to use her newly acquired position against us. If such was the position and if Lord Auckland's policy of 'establishing a strong and friendly power on the North-West Frontier' still held the field, we should drop our policy of 'masterly inactivity' for a more positive policy not only in Afghanistan but also in Persia. Such a policy might include the payment of a subsidy to the Amir, the provision of arms and of officers to train his army, the establishment of a permanent British envoy at Kabul, and the occupation of Quetta. But Rawlinson, while pointing out that all these steps to forestall Russian influence in Afghanistan would have to be taken sooner or later, was careful to leave the timing of them to the men on the spot. This memorandum, though it failed to move Lawrence or Mayo, remained as the foundation on which the 'forward policy' was gradually built up.

¹ Sir Francis Humphrys.

We find therefore at the close of this decade that there were two diametrically opposed policies as to the political strategy to be followed on the north-west frontier of India. We should also note that these policies concerned the greatest land frontier in the Empire save the Canadian-American frontier, and that it was one of the most difficult frontiers in the world. There was no straightforward solution, save war, to a problem in which the contrivings of man had increased in so lamentable a fashion the difficulties already imposed by nature. Either of the solutions propounded by the opposing schools of thought had much to commend it, but neither was wholly satisfactory. Lawrence's policy involved non-interference with the Amir, modified assistance in arms and money, a disregard of the immediate menace of Russia, and a determination not to be drawn into distant conflict but to meet the Russians if they came on ground of our own choosing. It was a magnificent policy so long as the Amir remained friendly and undisturbed by Russian propinquity, and it could with little difficulty be changed into a more positive policy if the Amir asked for closer relations. But it took an iron nerve and much confidence to remain untroubled in India not knowing when the Russians might move, or what devil's cauldron might be brewing behind the mountains of the Hindu Kush. The issues of the policy of masterly inactivity were too difficult and too delicate, there were so many factors which might destroy their equilibrium, and there were no means of restoring the balance once this was upset.

The menace of Russia was increasing. After a pause to digest Samarqand and consolidate their acquisitions by establishing the province of Turkestan, General Kaufmann found himself embroiled with Khiva, where after a brief conflict the Khan was reduced to vassalage in 1873. To Sher Ali the omens were unmistakable, there was now only Merv and the Oxus left between him and the Russians, and at any moment an influx of refugees might embroil him with his great neighbour in the north. He turned to his erstwhile friends and supporters in the south for advice and support. But there was now no question of personal contact, and the statesmanship of Lord Mayo, who had been assassinated in the previous year, was lacking. A British plenipotentiary in Kabul could have cleared away many doubts and misgivings in the Amir's mind. There was no possibility of

sending such a mission in the face of the Amir's strong and reasonable objections. Instead the Amir's agent came to Simla where he discussed the situation with the Viceroy and his advisers. He asked for a definite statement of British policy in the event of Russian aggression. He was told that the Russians had agreed to respect the northern boundaries of Afghanistan which followed the course of the Oxus from its source in the Pamirs to a point named Khwaja Salar and thence south-west to the Persian border so as to include within Afghan limits the provinces of Balkh, Andkhui, Maimana, and Herat. The Russian Government had agreed that the territories of the Amir contained by this boundary were completely outside the sphere, within which they might be called on to exercise influence.

The effect of this agreement was, in the opinion of the British Government, 'materially to strengthen the position of Afghanistan and to remove apprehension of danger from without'.¹

This suggestion that the Amir might sleep safe in his bed was easier to write in Simla than it would be to read in Kabul. The Amir's envoy realized this and pressed for some definite statement of what the British would do, if in spite of all assurances invasion did take place. The Viceroy, Lord Northbrook, would have liked to inform the Amir that 'if he unreservedly accepts our advice in all external relations, we will help him with money, arms and troops if necessary to expel unprovoked invasion'.² But the recommendation was not acceptable to a Secretary of State³ still largely under the influence of Lawrence's policy of non-interference. Lord Northbrook's advice was rejected and all he was allowed to tell the Amir was that 'the question is . . . of such importance that the discussion of it should be postponed to a more suitable opportunity'. With this astoundingly feeble solution to the major and pressing question under discussion the Amir's agent returned to Kabul and reported to his master that his mission had failed.

The Amir was bitterly disappointed, and to his disappointment over the Russian question were added such matters as the British award in the Sistan boundary dispute, which though scrupulously fair had favoured Persia, and personal pinpricks such as the

¹ H.E. The Viceroy to H.H. The Amir, 6 September 1873.

² H.E. The Viceroy to the Secretary of State, 24 September 1873.

³ The Duke of Argyll.

Viceroy's unwillingness to recognize the Amir's youngest son as his heir, and his intervention in favour of his eldest son, Yaqub Khan, whom the Amir had put under arrest. Such matters as these were of no great importance to the Government of India, and the Amir's wishes might well have been respected with much advantage to personal relations and little if any detriment to the political situation. One gets the impression that this great and good man, Lord Northbrook, was possibly better at dealing with 'things' than with 'people', particularly such prickly, awkward people as Afghans are liable to be in matters of personal prestige and in times of stress. The delicate balance of the policy of non-interference was already getting seriously upset when in the spring of 1876 Lord Northbrook was succeeded by Lord Lytton, who arrived in India armed with an entirely fresh set of instructions to guide the Government of India's attitude to the Central Asian problem.

Chapter VIII

THE FORWARD POLICY AND THE SECOND AFGHAN WAR

(1875-1879)

IN February 1874 the British Cabinet which had supported Lord Lawrence's non-intervention policy in Afghanistan was replaced by a Government headed by Benjamin Disraeli, with Lord Salisbury at the India Office. The tendency to treat external affairs, whether foreign or imperial, as outside the sphere of party politics was less pronounced three-quarters of a century ago than it is now, and there were in addition many factors at work to persuade the British Cabinet that a more positive policy in Central Asia than that which had held the field for upwards of twenty years was now imperative.

There was in the first place the eloquent advocacy of the forward policy school of thought to point to the fact that in Afghanistan the non-intervention policy was getting us no further and was in fact leading to the gradual estrangement of the Afghan ruler. There was in addition the growing menace of Russia, and although the Secretary of State was not impressed by any sense of immediate risk of invasion, it was uncomfortable to know so little of what was going on in Afghanistan. In a series of private letters Lord Salisbury pressed this view on Lord Northbrook, and followed these up by an official intimation that the Government of India should endeavour to persuade the Amir to agree to the establishment of British officials at Herat to serve as a listening-post for what was happening beyond the Afghan boundaries. The Government of India demurred to this suggestion; they were still wedded to the 'Lawrentian' policy, and while they agreed that the presence of a British officer in Herat would be of much value, they expressed the view that the cordial assent of the Amir to such a proposal at the present time was so unlikely as to make it highly inadvisable for them to take the initiative in the matter. Throughout 1875 the non-interventionists stuck to their guns, while the Secretary of State urged

more active measures. An acute difference on so major a matter of policy could only be resolved in one way. At the beginning of 1876 Lord Northbrook resigned and was succeeded by Lord Lytton, who brought with him the full flood of the forward policy which the Viceroy's Council, albeit with some misgivings, were prevailed on to accept.¹ The rulers of India were once more, after a lapse of forty years, obeying the deep-rooted impulse which was urging them forward to possess and control their natural frontiers.

Their line of approach to the problem is interesting since it embodied the same general principles as those laid down by Lord Auckland's Government and it contained proposals for a course of action which have reappeared at intervals in Anglo-Afghan affairs right up to 1939. The principal objective of the British Government's policy was: 'the maintenance in Afghanistan of a strong and friendly power'. The attainment of this object was now to be considered 'with due reference to the situation created by the recent and rapid advance of the Russian army in Central Asia towards the northern frontiers of British India'. His Majesty's Government could not view with complete indifference

the probable influence of that situation upon the uncertain character of an Oriental Chief whose ill-defined dominions are thus brought within a steadily narrowing circle, between the conflicting pressures of two great military empires, one of which expostulates and remains passive, while the other apologizes and continues to move forward.²

What then was to be done? The first and obvious move was to re-establish direct contact with Sher Ali by the dispatch of a British Mission to Kabul. The Mission, if successful, would lead up to the appointment of a British Minister at the Amir's Court. As a corollary to this the Amir might ask for a subsidy, for recognition of his younger son, Abdullah Jan, as heir to the throne, and for a treaty guaranteeing material support in case of foreign aggression. The first two requests could be granted without difficulty. The third represented a problem which in the years following the Second Afghan War has often proved a stumbling-block to successive British Governments which could

¹ Both Sir W. Muir and Sir H. Norman appear to have accepted this change of policy with reluctance.

² Memorandum of instructions to Lord Lytton.

not or would not face the realities of the situation. To Lord Salisbury the issue was abundantly clear: 'With or without any such assurance [of support]', he wrote, 'England would be impelled by her own interests to assist His Highness in repelling the invasion of his territory by a foreign Power.' This is the crucial argument on which has depended in fact the whole British policy towards Afghanistan. Make what bargain you like with the Afghans, safeguard yourselves in every possible way against an unwise Afghan policy towards her northern neighbours; but make no mistake! No rulers of India can afford to allow a powerful and potentially hostile state to occupy or to outflank the great frontier barrier of India—the mountains of the Hindu Kush. This is the simple fact, on which has depended the peace of Asia. It is a fact which has come down to us through history, it is a fact which many British Governments unwilling to commit themselves and their successors to any uncompromising declaration of policy have evaded or ignored, but it still remains, even to-day in spite of all modern inventions and devices, as true as when over 2,000 years ago the Greeks crossed the Hindu Kush to found the first European Empire of India.

Lord Salisbury recognized this fact and authorized the Viceroy, if he considered it advisable, to give Sher Ali 'a promise, not vague, but strictly guarded and clearly circumscribed, of adequate aid against actual and unprovoked attack by any foreign power'.¹

Thus once more the stage was set for British intervention in Afghan affairs, and for two years Lord Lytton endeavoured conscientiously to carry out his instructions. A few weeks after reaching Calcutta he caused a letter to be sent from the Commissioner of Peshawar asking the Amir to receive his envoy. But by this time the rift between Sher Ali and the British rulers of India was widening dangerously. There had been for some time past a steady flow of letters from General Kaufmann in Turkestan to the Amir. In the spring of 1876 he had just received one containing a long and suggestive narrative of events in Khoqand whose independence was now gravely threatened by Russia. Sher Ali sent it to Lord Lytton and it became the subject of diplomatic correspondence between London and St. Petersburg; but at the same time he refused courteously but quite firmly to receive the British envoy, on the grounds that he could

¹ Ibid.

not guarantee his safety and his fear lest the reception of a British envoy in Kabul would involve him in a similar request from Russia.

Lord Lytton pointed out that the Russians were debarred from making such a request by their acknowledgement in 1873 that Afghanistan was outside their sphere of influence. But still the letters from Kaufmann kept coming in, while all the anti-British sentiment engendered by the First Afghan War combined with Sher Ali's growing estrangement from his former friends to render a direct approach impossible. The Viceroy persisted and finally with obvious reluctance Sher Ali agreed to send an emissary to meet the Viceroy's representative, Sir Lewis Pelly, in Peshawar. Unfortunately he chose his Minister, Sa'id Nur Muhammad, whose anti-British bias since his failure in 1873 was well known and whose failing health added to the difficulties of negotiation. The first meeting took place on 30 January and the last on 19 February 1877. Sir Lewis Pelly was armed with full instructions including the draft of a treaty of 14 Articles, with a supplementary secret agreement of 7 Articles. But negotiations never passed beyond preliminaries. At his first meeting with Pelly's Secretary the Afghan envoy stated that the Amir had 'a deep-rooted mistrust of the good faith and sincerity of the British Government'. Three successive meetings of the conference were taken up with a recital of these grievances. It also became evident that Sher Ali considered the British Government bound, in honour and by contract, to afford him and his dynasty such military support as he might require, and was in this respect quite content with the present position. But the negotiations broke down on the question of the establishment of British officers on the Afghan frontier to watch events. The ground for this refusal, which subsequent events showed to be justified, was the anxiety of the Amir lest harm should befall these officers and bitterness and estrangement between the two countries should result. Sir Lewis Pelly held this to debar him from proceeding with the negotiations, and referred to the Viceroy for orders. In the meantime information was reaching India that the Amir was making warlike preparations aimed rather against his British than his Russian neighbours, both of whom, however, he denounced as enemies of Islam. He was further alleged to be seeking the support of the chiefs nearest to

the British border in the forthcoming *jehad* (holy war), and to be in correspondence even with those who were known to be subsidized by the Indian Government. In such circumstances the Viceroy considered that no useful purpose would be served by prolonging the negotiations. Under his instructions Sir Lewis Pelly addressed a final letter to the Afghan envoy in which he entered into a careful review of the relations existing between the two Governments. He pointed out that there was no desire on the part of the British Government to enforce any arrangements upon the Amir, but that as His Highness was dissatisfied with past relations and equally so with the proposals made for their improvement there was no alternative but to look on him as an unsatisfactory neighbour. An essential condition of improved relations was the reception of British officers on the northern frontier. As the Amir had refused this condition the British Government must repudiate all obligations entered into or offered, save those contained in the Treaty of 1855 which alone could be looked on as a permanent obligation binding both countries. While they would continue scrupulously to respect the integrity and independence of the Amir's dominions, they would undertake no liabilities on behalf of the Amir or his dynasty either now or in future without adequate guarantees for his satisfactory conduct. At the same time should the people of Afghanistan, with whom the British Government had no quarrel, refrain from all acts of aggression upon their territories or friends, they would doubtless be disposed and prepared to respond to a national appeal for assistance against aggression.

This letter was delivered to the Afghan envoy early in March 1877. But Nur Muhammad was by this time stricken with a fatal illness from which he died some three weeks later without being able to reply. At the time of his death the Viceroy received information that the Amir had instructed his deputy to prolong the conference pending the arrival of a fresh envoy, and that this envoy had authority to accept all the conditions of the British Government. It seemed, however, to the Viceroy that in face of the situation revealed by Sir Lewis Pelly's investigations further discussion was useless. The conference was, therefore, at once closed.

It was an unfortunate decision, though perhaps at the time it seemed that the only course to take was to break off relations.

But we, who knew that much-vexed frontier and our Afghan neighbours better than they were known to Lord Lytton and his advisers, are well aware how easily in times of tension rumour and report of war spreads and magnifies along the border line and how difficult British intelligence officers found it to appraise the situation behind the frontier hills in the face of exaggeration, intrigue, and unblushing mendacity. A certain tension in Anglo-Afghan relations was inevitable at this moment but not sufficient to call for a rupture of relations. Nor in so delicate a situation was a solution to be expected in a few short weeks. In 1921 the British Mission in Kabul,¹ though face to face with the Amir and his Ministers, took nine months of patient negotiation to conclude the treaty which thereafter governed Anglo-Afghan relations. In 1877 no progress could be expected until the Amir's representative had recited all his master's grievances and in the true fashion of oriental diplomacy had manœuvred for position through many weary hours of discussion. There is in such circumstances no way of hurrying the East. And we must conclude that the Viceroy and his advisers in abruptly terminating the Peshawar negotiations within less than two months and without waiting for a final answer to their proposals, acted with a precipitation which betrayed their inability to understand the mentality of the men they were dealing with, and shut the door to any hope of a peaceful solution to the crisis.

But it is conceivable that the Viceroy did not very much mind whether the outcome was peaceable or not. A study of his voluminous correspondence of this time, his minutes, his letters to Sher Ali, his instructions to his representative, indicate a certain impatience of mind and a perhaps rather rigid determination to achieve a well-defined objective, an objective, moreover, on which he had resolved before ever he left Britain. This objective was the ultimate expression of the forward policy, to be carried out with little or no regard for Afghan wishes, but with the unswerving determination to place the Indian defensive frontier where it had been in the days of the great Empires, in Asoka's day and in Akbar's day—on the northern ridges of the Hindu Kush with outposts in the Oxus Valley beyond. To accomplish such a task the Viceroy would either conclude an exclusive alliance with the Amir, or failing this break up the

¹ Under Sir Henry Dobbs—Pt. II, Ch. XI (1).

Afghan Kingdom and put in place of Sher Ali a ruler more friendly to our interests and more dependent on our support. If both these alternatives failed he would advocate, though with reluctance, the conquest and annexation of as much of Afghanistan as might be necessary to secure his objectives. The limit of these objectives was 'an outer line with the Oxus for ultimate boundary, and Balkh, Maimana, Herat for its main outposts . . .'¹

This then was the high-water mark of the British forward policy, the process of imperial expansion carried to its logical conclusion so that the progress and prosperity of the great dominion of India might continue and flourish behind the safe shelter of this massive mountain barrier with its outposts guarding the northern approaches and the vulnerable western flank. It was a great conception and had it been carried through in 1879 and 1880 to its ultimate conclusion the history of north-western India would thenceforward have taken a very different course. But it was not carried through, partly owing to political upheavals in Britain and partly to the hard core of stubborn resistance to foreign domination manifested by the Pathan races of southern and south-eastern Afghanistan. In the following pages we shall see how this came about and what effect it has had on the course of Central Asian history.

The breakdown of the Peshawar negotiations did not immediately lead to war. An uneasy period of uncertainty followed during which no intercourse took place between Calcutta and Kabul, where the Viceroy proposed to 'let the Amir (if I may use a coarse but expressive phrase of Prince Bismarck's) stew for a while in his own gravy'. Meanwhile a steady stream of correspondence developed between General Kaufmann and the Amir. In Asia, the Russians grew daily more formidable as in the spring of 1877 Khoqand followed Khiva into the Russian net, and a force set out from the Caspian to reconnoitre the Turkman country in the direction of Merv. In Europe this was followed in the summer of 1877 by the outbreak of war between Russia and Turkey. This threat to the future control of the Dardanelles led to a period of extreme tension between Russia

¹ Letter to the Secretary of State, Lord Cranbrook, 3 August 1878. There is in some of these phrases an ominous similarity to Lord Auckland's attitude to the problem.

and Britain. At the beginning of 1878 war seemed imminent, a contingent of troops from India was dispatched to Malta, and as the Russians closed in on the Bosphorus a British fleet entered the Dardanelles and on 13 February anchored off the Golden Horn. For six months the armies of Russia and the fleet of Britain lay almost within gunshot of each other with the city of Constantinople between them, while the issues of war and peace hung in the balance. But on the signature of peace between Russia and Turkey European tension gradually relaxed until in June 1878 the great powers met at the Congress of Berlin, from which Lord Beaconsfield returned in July bearing with him 'Peace with Honour'.

But the repercussions of the Anglo-Russian crisis proved disastrous to Sher Ali.

As a counterpart to warlike British measures in Europe, the Russians began to move troops towards the Afghan frontier and in the summer of 1878 dispatched a diplomatic mission to the Amir. This mission, which left Samarqand the day after the first meeting of the Congress of Berlin, was headed by General Stolietov, who carried a letter from General Kaufmann instructing him to make certain important communications with reference to the then existing relations between Russia and Britain and their bearing on the position of Afghanistan. A situation had thus arisen which bore out the arguments and confirmed the forebodings of Sir Henry Rawlinson stated ten years before.¹ Had war broken out in the spring of 1878 in Europe, British and Russian troops would undoubtedly have clashed in Asia and the struggle for the Hindu Kush would have been decided by force of arms. But by the time the Russian mission reached Kabul all danger of war in Europe had passed. The only effect of the mission was to give Lord Lytton the opportunity he sought to establish a 'scientific' frontier for India, and to condemn Sher Ali to the fate of a pawn in the great game of Central Asia.

On hearing of the dispatch of the Russian mission Sher Ali was seized with panic and tried to stop it. But the situation had passed beyond his control. Stolietov reached Kabul early in July and was received in durbar on the 26th. The Government of India reacted swiftly. On 14 August Lord Lytton wrote to the Amir informing him that General Sir Neville Chamberlain

¹ p. 133.

was proceeding 'immediately' to Kabul to converse personally with His Highness regarding certain urgent affairs. The death of the heir-apparent in Kabul on 17 August delayed matters for a few weeks, but the Amir received Lord Lytton's letter on 12 September. No reply had been received by 21 September, on which day Major (afterwards Sir Louis) Cavagnari with a small escort met the Afghan outpost commander at Ali Masjid in the Khyber Pass and was peremptorily refused permission for the British envoy to proceed. Preparations for a forcible entry into Afghanistan by the Khyber, Kurram, and Quetta routes were put in hand, and when on 19 October a reply of a most unsatisfactory and somewhat insulting nature was received from Sher Ali the Government of India asked permission to order an advance. His Majesty's Government, however, tried the effect of an ultimatum to which no answer was received. British forces were in consequence set in motion on 21 November 1878.

Meanwhile the arrival of the Russian mission in Kabul had formed the subject of correspondence between the British and Russian Governments. The Russian ministers frankly avowed that the dispatch of this mission was due to the necessities of the situation arising from the imminent prospect of war between Russia and Britain. It was a temporary mission, the need for which had now disappeared. It would be withdrawn so soon as the British Government agreed that all engagements entered into between Britain and Russia with regard to Afghanistan remained in full force. Her Majesty's Government agreed that this should be so, as soon as the mission was withdrawn, and on 17 December parried a skilful attempt by the Russian Government to use their mission, which was still in Kabul, to mediate between Britain and the Amir. The latter, finding that his attempt to ally himself with Russia had brought him to hostilities with Britain, turned to his allies for support. But General Kaufmann refused his assistance, basing his refusal on the impossibility of sending Russian troops across the passes of the Hindu Kush in winter. The Amir, bitterly disappointed, renewed his appeal on the grounds of old friendship and the recent alliance concluded through General Stolietov on the part of his Imperial Majesty. On 22 December, however, he left Kabul with the remaining members of the Russian mission. In a letter issued that day to the officers of the British Government he announced his intention

of proceeding to St. Petersburg to lay the whole history of his transactions with Britain before the Tsar. He took refuge in Russian territory, where his presence was the cause of some embarrassment to his erstwhile allies, but he was dissuaded from proceeding to St. Petersburg, and advised to return to his own kingdom and make peace with the British. He returned to Mazar-i-Sharif and there died, a broken-hearted man, on 21 February 1879.

Before leaving Kabul Sher Ali handed over control of affairs to his son, Yaqub Khan, whom he appointed Regent. In the first few weeks of the war British troops were everywhere successful, and by the middle of January the Khyber column had reached Jalalabad, the Kurram force was in possession of the formidable Peiwar Kotal, while the southern column had entered Qandahar and taken over the surrounding district with little opposition and no appearance of national resentment.

Negotiations for a settlement were now opened with Yaqub Khan and were concluded with ominous facility by the end of May. The principal clauses of the treaty engaged the Amir to conduct his relations with foreign states in accordance with the advice and wishes of the British Government, and to receive a permanent British representative at Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan as required. The British were to retain control of the Khyber Pass and of the districts of Kurram, Pishin, and Sibi, and to pay the Amir a subsidy of £60,000 a year.

Lord Lytton was delighted at the success of his policy and his satisfaction was shared by the Government at home and by such frontier experts as Cavagnari, on whom now fell the honour of being the first envoy under the new treaty to be accredited to the Afghan Amir. There were a few, like General Roberts, who were less confident. To them it seemed that the Amir had been altogether too facile. In a few weeks he had accepted all the proposals, swallowed whole the clause concerning the reception of British agents in his country, to which his much abler father and grandfather had been so resolutely opposed, and only ventured a mild protest against the loss of the fertile Kurram Valley and other areas. But his position was difficult and it would have required a much stronger man to deal with British insistence on their own point of view as to the best method of solving the Afghan problem. The fault does not lie with Yaqub, but rather

with the intractable nature of the problem itself, in which he and Sir Louis Cavagnari were just another couple of pawns which had to be sacrificed before the correct solution could be found.

The British mission, with Cavagnari at its head, reached Kabul in July. After six weeks of uneasy quiet they were attacked on 3 September by a body of mutinous Afghan soldiers in their house situated in the lower part of the great fortress of the Bala Hisar, of which the Amir's palace formed the upper portion. The escort, under Lieutenant Hamilton of the Guides, put up a gallant resistance, but the Amir made no move to intervene and after a fight which lasted for a few hours the mutineers set fire to the buildings and massacred the entire mission and all but a few men of the escort. So ended the second British attempt to dominate Afghanistan and control the north-western approaches to India.

The next phase opened swiftly. The three British armies were still in being and while the northern and southern forces were ordered to reoccupy Jalalabad and Qandahar, General Roberts was instructed to move from the Kurram Valley directly on Kabul. By 1 October he had reached the Logar Valley some forty miles from Kabul, where he was joined by the Amir, whose attitude throughout was extremely dubious. Roberts was, however, not deterred by the Amir's attempts to delay his advance, and after a brief, decisive engagement with Afghan forces at Charasiah, occupied the Bala Hisar on 12 October. Shortly afterwards the Amir, dissatisfied with his position and unwilling to share the fate of Shah Shuja, abdicated and was removed with his family to India.

Roberts now assumed control of Kabul and the surrounding country. He took over the Treasury, set up a court to try those suspected of having taken part in the attack on the mission, and by proclamation instructed the various chiefs to remain at their posts and to continue the civil administration and the collection of revenue. But the country was by no means pacified. Early in December information reached Roberts that Afghan forces were collecting in the Maidan Valley with the object of regaining possession of the city. In an endeavour to intercept these bodies Roberts narrowly escaped disaster and for a short time the position of his force was critical. By the end of December, however, the enemy had been decisively defeated, communications

had been reopened with Peshawar, and Kabul city reassumed a normal aspect. In southern Afghanistan all was quiet and in April the Qandahar force, after one fierce engagement with the Ghilzais, reached Kabul where its commander, General Sir Donald Stewart, assumed control of the military and civil administration. For the second time in history the British were in possession of Kabul, and in a position if they so desired to assume direct control of the country of the Hindu Kush.

This seems to have been Lord Lytton's first reaction to the news of Cavagnari's fate. Writing to the Prime Minister early in September he notes that

we may now be forced to take in hand the permanent disintegration of the national fabric it was our object to cement in Afghanistan, and that in any case we shall probably be compelled to intervene more widely and actively than we have ever desired to do in that country. Still, the renewed, and perhaps extended, efforts now imposed upon us can have no other result, if rightly directed, than the firmer establishment of the undisputed supremacy of the British power from the Indus to the Oxus. . . .¹

Here again we find that the uppermost thought in the Viceroy's mind was the logical conclusion of the forward policy. The fact, which at this time was only suspected but which Yaqub Khan was shortly to confirm, that Sher Ali had actually concluded a treaty of close alliance with Russia which would have given the Russians virtual control of Afghanistan, was sufficient to convince the Viceroy that such a risk should never be run again. The non-intervention policy had proved for whatever reason a costly and dangerous failure; the only alternative was British intervention in the fullest sense.

But this attitude was not maintained. At the outset Lord Lytton and the Secretary of State were in agreement that 'Afghanistan as a whole could no longer exist',² a point of view which was confirmed by the Cabinet in December. It was decided to hand over Qandahar under British suzerainty to a Sadozai Sirdar, Sher Ali, while the Foreign Office opened negotiations with Persia for the transfer of Herat, an amazing aberration of statesmanship, which fortunately came to nothing. But the problem of what to do with central Afghanistan remained

¹ Lord Lytton to Lord Beaconsfield, September 1879.

² Lord Cranbrook to the Viceroy, 12 October 1879.

unsolved. As time went on and the cost of even temporary occupation mounted the Viceroy retired from the high-water mark of forward policy. He had no desire to be caught in the same net which had enmeshed Lord Auckland, and by March 1880 was looking for some plausible excuse for withdrawal from Kabul. Mr. Lepel Griffin was sent up in March to undertake diplomatic and administrative superintendence of affairs and negotiations,¹ or in other words to find someone to whom charge of Kabul and the surrounding country could safely be entrusted. In his instructions to Griffin the Viceroy mentioned but rejected the alternatives of annexation, military occupation, or temporary occupation until the secure establishment of a friendly ruler, as not being in accordance with previous British declarations, and as not likely to produce a safe and comparatively speedy settlement without greatly irritating the people of the country, entailing enormous additional cost to the finance of India, and placing a heavy strain on the army.²

It is difficult to appreciate Lord Lytton's change of attitude in so short a time. When he embarked on the Second Afghan War he had all Lord Auckland's bitter experience to inform and guide him, and he must have realized that nothing short of annexation at any rate up to the Hindu Kush would solve the problem before him. Admittedly he was not in favour of annexation, but he could hardly have based his policy on the assumption that after overrunning the country and thereby once more inflaming the hatred of every patriotic Afghan against us, we should by some magic discover among the Afghan chiefs a leader who would be acceptable both to ourselves and to the Afghan people. To base the policy of a great strategic move on so slender a chance would have been the act of a fool and a gambler, and we have no evidence that Lord Lytton was either. And yet this is what he did, comforting himself with the reflection that our hold on Qandahar and the Kurram Valley was sufficient for the needs of the forward policy, no matter who ruled in Kabul. The amazing thing is that while his assumption was wholly unwarranted his gamble was successful. While the British and Indian Governments were arguing over the dismembered corpse of the Afghan Kingdom, the one man who could fulfil the requirements of a desperately

¹ Lady B. Balfour, *Lord Lytton's Indian Administration*, p. 403.

² *Ibid.*, p. 404.

difficult situation was moving southwards into Afghanistan. Early in March 1880 word came to the British authorities in Kabul that Sardar Abdur Rahman, son of Sher Ali's elder half-brother, Muhammad Afzal Khan, had quitted Russian territory and had crossed the Oxus with a small following.

Chapter IX

THE 'GREAT GAME' CONCLUDED— FROM THE SECOND AFGHAN WAR TO THE CONVENTION OF ST. PETERSBURGH (1879-1907)

(I)

A CONTEMPORARY description of the man whom providence had sent in answer to the British prayer for a strong and friendly ruler of the Afghan Kingdom runs as follows:

Amir Abdur Rahman Khan is a man of about forty, of middle height and rather stout. He has an exceedingly intelligent face, brown eyes, a pleasant smile and a frank courteous manner. The impression that he left on me and the officers who were present at the interview was most favourable. He is by far the most prepossessing of all the Barakzai Sirdars whom I have met in Afghanistan, and in conversation showed both good sense and sound political judgement. He kept thoroughly to the point under discussion, and his remarks were characterized by shrewdness and ability. He appeared animated by a sincere desire to be on cordial terms with the British Government, and although his expectations were, as might have been anticipated, larger than Government is prepared to satisfy, yet he did not press them with any discourteous insistence, and the results of the interviews may be considered on the whole to be highly satisfactory.¹

This was just the type of man for the task in hand,² and the British Government lost no time in transferring into his keeping their rights in an acquisition which was both embarrassing and expensive. They told him that Qandahar was not included in the bargain, but that he was at liberty to assume control of all the rest of the country including Herat, which was at the moment in the possession of his cousin, Ayub Khan, SherAli's second son.

¹ Mr. Lepel Griffin to the Government of India, 4 August 1880.

² It is interesting to note that the four most able rulers of Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah, Dost Muhammad, Abdur Rahman, and Nadir Shah, all had experience of other countries and peoples besides their own.

The only other stipulation the British Government felt called upon to make was that the Amir should have no direct political relations with any foreign power. If he would follow British advice in his external relations Her Majesty's Government would, if necessary, assist him to repel unprovoked aggression.¹ Forty years later the grandson of Abdur Rahman went to war with Britain in order to get rid of this stipulation, which by 1919 was no longer in keeping with the spirit of the times.² But it had served its purpose and the success of the policy which in 1880 established the buffer state was in no small measure due to the statesmanlike qualities of the Amir himself. He understood very clearly the role he was called upon to play during the difficult and delicate negotiations which led to final equilibrium through the demarcation of the whole long frontier line from the Pamirs to the borders of Persia, and never once did he obstruct the efforts of the British Government to find a just solution to the problem.

But Abdur Rahman, while shrewd enough to realize that without British guidance and support he could not for long stand up to Russian encroachments, was determined in no circumstances to allow the fact of British suzerainty to take concrete shape before the eyes of his people, or to parade through the streets of Kabul guarded by British bayonets. He moved slowly southwards, gathering adherents as he went, and replying in courteous guarded language to the letters addressed to him by the British representative.

Meanwhile in Britain a drastic change had come over the political scene. A general election of which one of the main issues was our relations with Afghanistan had resulted in the overthrow of the forward policy school of thought and of the man who supported it. Back swung the pendulum to the non-interference policy of Lord Lawrence's day: on 28 April 1880 Lord Beaconsfield's Government was replaced by an administration headed by Mr. Gladstone and pledged to undo so far as possible the work of its predecessors in Afghanistan. Lord Lytton resigned along with his political friends and was succeeded in the following month as Viceroy of India by the Marquis of Ripon. In the words of Lord Beaconsfield, 'immediate and

¹ Letters from Mr. Lepel Griffin to H.H. Sardar Abdur Rahman Khan, dated 20 July 1880. (Sealed and delivered personally by Mr. Griffin on 31 July 1880.) Appendix III.

² See Chapter XI (1).

complete reversal of all that had occurred was the order given and the profession of faith announced'.¹

But as so frequently happens the new Government soon found that undertakings promised at the polls look very different when they come to be implemented by concrete action. Their criticism of the past was pungent.

Thus it appears [wrote the new Secretary of State for India, Lord Hartington, in his first dispatch to the new Viceroy] that as the result of two successful campaigns, of the employment of an enormous force, and of the expenditure of large sums of money, all that has yet been accomplished has been the disintegration of the State which it was desired to see strong, friendly and independent, the assumption of fresh and unwelcome liabilities in regard to one of its provinces, and a condition of anarchy throughout the remainder of the country.²

Undoubtedly there was material for criticism in the policy which led up to the Second Afghan War, and to the manner in which it had been conducted. But when it came to a consideration of future policy the new Government found that the late Viceroy, as we have seen, had already retired from the outposts of the forward policy, and in his anxiety to avoid the cost of a prolonged occupation of Afghanistan was moving heaven and earth to get out of the place as soon as possible. His plans for accomplishing this task were already in train and Lord Ripon found no reason to alter them. At the end of July 1880 Abdur Rahman, who had by this time crossed the Hindu Kush and had reached the Koh-i-Daman Valley, forty miles north of Kabul, was recognized as Amir at a durbar held half-way between Charikar and Kabul. Twelve days later the British forces evacuated Kabul and withdrew unmolested from eastern Afghanistan. Control of the Khyber Pass and the Kurram Valley, through which ran the two main approaches to Kabul from India, were retained as arranged for by Lord Lytton in the Treaty of Gandamak. So far Her Majesty's new Government had done nothing to fulfil their election pledges.

In southern Afghanistan, however, the situation presented greater possibilities. In January 1880 when the forward policy

¹ *Hansard*, 3rd series, Vol. 257, p. 15.

² Secretary of State to the Governor-General of India in Council, No. 23 of 21 May 1880.

was being translated into concrete proposals for the future control of a dismembered Afghanistan, Lord Lytton's Government proposed to offer Herat and Sistan to Persia, and to form a separate state of Qandahar in charge of a member of the Sadozai family, Sardar Sher Ali, and subject to British suzerainty.¹ The Persian negotiations luckily fell through and Herat was left in a dangerous political vacuum while arrangements for the installation of Sher Ali as Wali of Qandahar proceeded. In the middle of May he was formally installed in the presence of his friends and adherents and of the British garrison by Colonel St. John, the political representative. Speeches were exchanged, and a sword of honour was buckled round the Wali's waist; 'on which His Highness said that he trusted he might have an opportunity of showing his readiness to draw it in the cause of the British Government'.² The opportunity came sooner than he expected. In July 1880 Ayub Khan moved south from Herat, crossed the Helmand and advanced on Qandahar. The Wali's army promptly deserted to Ayub and the British force under General Burrowes which had been sent out to oppose him was decisively defeated at Maiwand. The position in the city was critical until General Roberts's once-famous march from Kabul to Qandahar (334 miles) in twenty-three days relieved the situation. On the day after his arrival in Qandahar Roberts routed Ayub's force, which was in position in the hills north of the city, and restored morale and order in the city itself. But the Wali had no stomach for alarms and excursions of this nature. On the mutiny of his army he took refuge 'much depressed' with the British force³ but soon realized that he would be anathema to his friends if he relied on British help, and an easy prey to his enemies if he did not. When in November 1880 an opportunity was given him to unbuckle the sword he had too hastily put on in May, he cheerfully acquiesced, chose Karachi as a place of residence and prepared to leave at once.⁴

The stage was now cleared for Her Majesty's Government to fulfil some, at any rate, of their election pledges, and by with-

¹ Government of India to the Secretary of State, 7 January 1880. *Parliamentary Papers C.* 2840.

² Memorandum from Col. O. B. St. John to Mr. A. C. Lyall, Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, 19 May 1880.

³ Dispatch from the Secretary of State to the Government of India, No. 45, dated 11 November 1880. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 70 of 1881.

⁴ Viceroy to Secretary of State, telegram of 30 September 1880. *Ibid.*

drawing from Qandahar to reverse so far as possible the forward policy of the previous six years. It was a decision of the first importance, so vital to the future of India that one would like to think it had been reached on its merits alone and not merely to serve the needs of the domestic politics of Great Britain. This can hardly be said to be the case. Within a month of his succeeding to office we find the new Secretary of State throwing grave doubts on the wisdom of retaining our hold on Qandahar and asking the Viceroy, Lord Ripon, to ascertain whether the British pledges to support Sher Ali could be withdrawn without breach of faith.¹ The new Government was determined to withdraw if possible and Sher Ali's incompetence culminating in the affair of Maiwand gave them the opportunity they sought. At the same time they did not reach a final decision without seeking the best advice available from those most competent to give it. And so in the autumn of 1880 once more we find the advocates of the two policies marshalling their arguments and urging their points of view. Once more Her Majesty's Government pass under review the vexed question of where the frontier of India should be drawn. Should it extend as some advocated so as to include the province of Qandahar with a very probable further extension to Herat, or should we retire as others urged not only from Qandahar but also from Pishin and Quetta so that all Baluchistan as far as Sibi returned to Afghan hands? On the whole opinion seemed to be nearly equally divided,² and when in November 1880 the Secretary of State pronounced the decision to withdraw he admitted that 'the question is one on which those who are responsible for the Government of India must form their own judgement upon two absolutely conflicting lines of policy, between which there is no room for compromise'.³

But this decision was still subject to ratification by Parliament. The Speech from the Throne in January 1881 included the statement that Her Majesty had been advised to abandon Qandahar.⁴

¹ Dispatch from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy, dated 21 May 1880. Ibid.

² The Duke of Cambridge, the Commander-in-Chief in India, Lord Napier of Magdala, and Lord Roberts, to name a few, were in favour of the retention of Qandahar; Sir Robert Montgomery, the Hon. Evelyn Baring (afterwards Lord Cromer), and Lt.-General Sir Garnet (afterwards Lord) Wolseley were against it.

³ Dispatch from the Secretary of State to the Government of India, No. 45, dated 11 November 1880. *Parliamentary Papers* (C. 2776).

⁴ *Hansard*, 1881, 3rd series, Vol. 257, p. 3.

A few weeks later Lord Lytton in the House of Lords strenuously opposed the reversal of his policy. He noted that his Government had failed first with Sher Ali and after the Treaty of Gandamak with Yaqub Khan to bind the Afghan ruler to them by ties of self-interest and goodwill, and it was obvious to him (Lord Lytton) that 'if you cannot have moral guarantees for the adequate control of the Kabul power, then you must have material guarantees', and that these could only be provided by the retention of Qandahar.¹ The controversy continued until March 1881 when the Government, unmoved by the eloquence of Lord Lytton and his friends, sought and obtained the approval of the House of Commons² to their decision to withdraw, though this decision was modified to the extent of excluding Pishin and Sibi from the area to be handed back to the Afghans. And so the British marched out of Qandahar and Abdur Rahman after some difficulties with Ayub marched in and shortly afterwards occupied Herat. The British retained their hold on the Khyber Pass, on the Kurram Valley, and on Pishin and Quetta, and this was all they achieved out of the Second Afghan War, save the goodwill of a master of men, the Amir Abdur Rahman, and the hatred of his subjects.

We may truly say, as we look back across the pages of history at this most remarkable settlement, that never perhaps in an issue of such importance did a great nation gamble on so slender a chance. The policy of Her Majesty's Government was founded on the intention to undo as much as possible of the work of its predecessors. It was supported by certain very cogent arguments, the cost of occupation, the difficulties of administration, and the strategic advantage of keeping the Russian and Indian boundaries as far apart as possible. But for its success or failure it depended entirely on the attitude of the Amir. If Abdur Rahman was prepared to fulfil his undertakings, and administer his unruly country while faithfully leaving in British hands the control of his foreign relations, then our withdrawal from Qandahar would be an act of elementary justice and would remove a standing source of friction, and a very probable cause of conflict. But if he wished to play us false we were giving him

¹ *Hansard*, 1881, 3rd series, Vol. 257, p. 284.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. 257. The motion against withdrawal was defeated after a long debate.

every opportunity to do so with impunity. And yet we retired from Afghanistan, leaving the vital north-west frontier of India, the mountains of the Hindu Kush, embedded in the territories of a man of whom we knew nothing save that he had been for twelve years an exile in Russian territory and subject to Russian influence, and that he was now ruler of a country whose inhabitants had every reason to hate and fear us. It was an astounding thing to do, a typical piece of liberal statesmanship in which political antagonisms were mixed up with practical expediency, where the line of least resistance seemed to coincide conveniently with a rather smug impression of doing the right thing by the Afghan people, and underlying all this the comfortable conviction that if we 'let the Afghans entirely alone, we will find that they will be just as ready to resist the Russians as they have ever been to resist the British'.¹

Thus in 1881 was the 'buffer state' established and the policy formulated which for forty years was to hold the field in our relations with Afghanistan. Its efficacy was soon to be put to the test.

About 160 miles north of the present Russo-Afghan frontier at Kushk lies the great oasis of Merv, one of the most fertile areas in Central Asia and the site, among many other ruined cities which date back at least to the time of Alexander the Great, of a former capital of Khurasan in the days of Arab rule. This splendid centre of commerce and learning shared with other great cities of Central Asia the destruction wrought by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and from this period it gradually fell into decay. The oasis changed rulers many times and at the end of the eighteenth century was laid waste by the forces of the Amir of Bukhara. When Alexander Burnes passed through it in 1832 the Khivans were in possession; a few years later the Tekke Turkmen moved northward under Persian pressure from the Hari Rud and took possession of the oasis.

The Tekkes were one section of the Turkman people, said by some authorities to be the descendants of the Parthians, who inhabited the country lying between the south-eastern Caspian and the lower Oxus. They were nomads, freebooters, and raiders, a thorn in the side of the Governor of north-eastern Persia, and a terror to the caravans passing north across the Kara Kum sands to Khiva or north-east to Bukhara and Samarqand.

¹ Ibid., Vol. 259, p. 1839.

They were the last of the free people of Central Asia to be reached and overcome by the inexorable advance of Russia.

After the Russian absorption of Khiva in 1873¹ there was a pause. Further expansion south or south-westwards was hampered by the desert and the Kara Kum sands, and although a column had marched from the recently acquired port of Krasnovodsk (Qizil-Su) to assist in the operations against Khiva, a direct advance eastward against so formidable a people as the Turkmen was no easy matter. It was, however, inevitable that sooner or later such an advance should take place. The Turkmen were too restless a people to make tolerable neighbours and the Russian Empire was still seeking its frontier. In 1877 and again in 1878 the Russians penetrated in force to a point some fifty miles beyond Qizil Arvat but returned after achieving no particular result.² In June 1879 a more determined advance under General Lomakin reached Gok Teppe in the Akhal oasis, where it was defeated with severe losses by the Turkmen and retired in inglorious confusion to the coast. The cause of this disaster lay chiefly in the difficulties of transport; it was reported that General Lomakin lost 12,000 camels in twenty days. The inevitable result was a renewal of the campaign on a more considerable scale. General Skobelev, who had won fame at Plevna in the Turkish War, was put in command and conceived the idea of running a railway across the desert from the coast to supply the army. In January 1881 the Russians attacked the main Turkman force in their entrenched camp at Gok Teppe, and defeated them with heavy loss. The Akhal oasis passed into Russian possession and the local Turkmen tribes tendered their submission. The Merv oasis alone remained untouched.

These events had given rise to recurring anxiety in London and Tehran. From 1866 onwards when an inquiry from the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg as to 'where it was the intention of Russia to stop' had elicited no very definite or satisfactory reply from Prince Gorchakov, the Russian advance had been an endless source of trouble to British statesmen. Again and again was the question raised in St. Petersburg and London only to meet with evasive replies, and assurances which were nullified almost as soon as given. The only concrete

¹ See Pt. II, Ch. VII, p. 134.

² *Memoranda on Russia in Central Asia*, Part I, p. 100, India Office Records.

result of British endeavours to place the greatest possible distance between the Russian and the Indian borders was the agreement of 1873, whereby Russia undertook to respect the northern boundaries of Afghanistan.¹ But when so many promises had been given and broken it was difficult to feel much confidence, more particularly since no one knew exactly where the north-western boundaries of Afghanistan were. This corner of Asia, once so important and populous, was now in fact a kind of no-man's-land where the interests of neighbouring countries faded away into the sands which surrounded it, and where there was only a shadow of sovereignty and the rule of law. In it three Empires were now meeting and for a brief moment the names of Merv and Panjdeh were to echo round the world.

Of the three Empires Persia had the only claim to sovereignty over the Merv oasis, but their hold on any of the country north and east of the Atrek and Tejend Rivers was unsubstantial. British endeavours to persuade them, by asserting their sovereignty over Merv, to bar the way to further Russian progress eastward were unsuccessful. In November 1881 the Governor of north-east Persia (Khurasan) informed the British Minister at Tehran that he had received the Shah's orders not to interfere further in respect of Merv,² and a month later an agreement concerning the Russo-Persian boundary as far as Luftabad was signed. It was obvious that, in spite of all assurances to the contrary, the Russians would shortly be in control of Merv.

The conquest of the Turkmen by Russia was an inevitable sequel to all that had preceded it, the final thrust of the great Russian machine before it came up against a barrier of competing interests sufficiently powerful to stay its progress. But there is no doubt that the Second Afghan War, and the strong probability that the British would shortly push their administered frontiers forward to Herat and the Hindu Kush, stimulated the Russians in their advance to the Akhal oasis. They reached it while the British were still in Qandahar. But by the time they had consolidated their hold and were ready for a fresh advance to Merv, they learnt that the British, far from advancing to Herat, had decided to retire from Qandahar. The necessity for immediate

¹ Pt. II, Ch. VII.

² Dispatch from the H.M.'s Minister Tehran to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 23 November 1881.

action had disappeared, and the future of Merv remained unsettled for three more years while Russian assurances grew less definite and their intention to control the whole Turkman country grew more apparent.¹ At last on 14 February 1884 the Russian Government announced the submission of the last of the Turkmen and the annexation of the Merv oasis.² This move carried out in the face of so many assurances to the contrary can be seen in the perspective of sixty years as an inevitable and logical development of Russian policy; its effect in Britain varied from the Duke of Argyll's *bon mot* that the Government were suffering from 'Mervousness', to the demand by an Hon. Member in the House of Commons that the Russian Government should be informed 'in the clearest manner that if they attacked Afghanistan in any way, if they intrigued with the Amir at Kabul, such action would be detrimental to the interests of this country and that it would be a *casus belli*'; a remark which though subsequently seen to be true was received with laughter.³ The motives underlying this last step in Russian expansion were frankly put to the Secretary of State, Lord Granville, by the Russian Ambassador a few days later when 'he alluded to the great difficulty which both Russian and English statesmen had always acknowledged to exist for a civilized Power to stop short in the extension of its territory where uncivilized tribes were its immediate neighbours'.⁴ This was, of course, part of the story but not the whole of it. British action in Afghanistan had, as we have noticed, helped to produce the Russian counter-move; there was in addition an ethnological reason which, as we shall shortly see, had not quite spent its force.

Whatever the Russian motives may have been, the obscurities and prevarications of diplomacy had at last been replaced by stark facts. The two great Empires were face to face. The distance from Merv to Herat was a little over 200 miles, and there were no intervening obstacles of any description to impede an advancing army or to form a natural frontier. Immediate action to stop any further advance by Russia was essential.

¹ *Memoranda on Russia in Central Asia*, Part III, India Office Records.

² *Ibid.*, Part IV.

³ *Hansard*, February 1884, 3rd series, Vol. 284.

⁴ *Memoranda on Russia in Central Asia*, Part IV, India Office Records.

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Lord Clarendon, writing to Sir Andrew Buchanan on 27 March 1869, summed up the situation in the following words :

I was sure, judging from our own Indian experience, that . . . Russia would find the same difficulty that England had experienced in controlling its own power when exercised at so great a distance from the seat of Government, as to make reference home almost a matter of impossibility ; there was always some frontier to be improved, some broken engagement to be repaired, some faithless ally to be punished, and plausible reasons were seldom wanted for the acquisition of territory which the home Government never thought it expedient to reject, and could not therefore condemn the motives or the means by which it had been acquired.¹

These experiences were now at an end. The two great Empires had reached the full limit of their expansion and for months the issues of peace and war hung poised in the scales, which slowly came to rest as equilibrium was attained. A single false move during these anxious months by either Government would have precipitated a conflict whose outcome no man could foresee. But the will for peace was there, and there were no conflicting ideologies to blur the picture and confuse the issues. And the men at the helm on both sides, if not good democrats, were at any rate experts in the difficult delicate game of international negotiation, and were untrammelled by the press and radio and the ill-informed criticism of world opinion. They were able to think coolly and clearly, to correct the indiscretions of their subordinates, and until some final stage was reached to keep the whole business behind the veil of secret diplomacy, a form of negotiation sadly discredited in modern times and yet quite indispensable for the successful conduct of international affairs.

The immediate objective of both Governments was to set up a precise frontier between Merv and Herat which would define on the ground and in exact terms the loose agreement of 1873.² Proposals to this end were agreed on in principle in the spring

¹ Quoted by Lord Edward Fitzmaurice in the House of Commons, 22 February 1884. *Hansard*, 3rd series, Vol. 284, p. 1779.

² See Ch. VII, p. 135.

of 1884,¹ and the task of arranging for British and Russian Commissions to meet and demarcate the boundary on the spot were taken in hand. The Government of India in a dispatch setting forth their views as to the best method of proceeding proposed

to accept accomplished facts, and instead of recording unavailing protests against the further progress of Russia, to obtain from her while there is time a definite agreement binding her not to pass beyond an Afghan frontier selected by us and demarcated in the presence of a joint Commission.²

This was all very well but the Government of India did not take into account the facts of the situation. If the British Government had accepted M. de Giers's offer of 1882³ to lay down the Afghan boundary before ever the Russians had reached Merv, a line of demarcation decided in accordance with Afghan and British wishes might perhaps have been arranged. But the British were at the time preoccupied with the idea of interposing Persian sovereignty between the Russians and the Afghan frontier, and no response was made to M. de Giers's offer. In 1884 the Russians had brushed aside any Persian pretensions to the country east of the Tejend River, and had every intention of arranging the frontier to suit themselves. Throughout the negotiations which ensued each Government followed a different line of argument. The British wanted two Commissions to meet on the spot with full powers to arrange a mutually agreeable frontier line, taking into account the legitimate rights of the Amir, while at the same time being careful, in order to reduce to the minimum the risk of future complications, to provide 'that no obligations are imposed on His Highness which he would be unwilling to assume or could not in practice adequately fulfil'.⁴ The Russians were not much concerned with the Amir's rights. Their objectives were clear-cut. They wanted their frontier and their outposts to be across the desert from Merv, and as near as possible to Herat, and they were determined that all Turkmen including the Sariks of Panjdeh

¹ Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, 29 April 1884. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 87.

² Dispatch from the Government of India to the Secretary of State, 11 March 1884. India Office Records.

³ Reported in a Dispatch from the British Ambassador, dated 29 April 1882.

⁴ Instructions to the British Commissioner, Sir Peter Lumsden, dated 25 August 1884. *Russia in Central Asia*. India Office Records.

should come under their control. While, therefore, the British Government rather vaguely sought a friendly talk between the two Commissioners on the question of the Amir's legal rights, the more realistic Russians wanted to settle the whole matter in London or St. Petersburg on a basis of ethnography and geography before ever the Commission met.

When the British failed to meet their point and dispatched a Commission under Sir Peter Lumsden in the autumn of 1884, the Russians procrastinated and chose for Commissioner a man who could not reach Merv till the following spring, leaving their local commanders and the pressure of events to obtain for them the position they required. The outcome was inevitable. In the early winter the Russian advanced posts were pushed forward up the east bank of the Hari Rud while Russian patrols reconnoitring southwards from Merv entered the province of Badghiz, where the glacis of the Paropamisus Mountains runs out to meet the sands of the Kara Kum. Meanwhile Sir Peter Lumsden restrained the Afghans and pending the arrival of his Russian colleague, General Zelenoi, reported at length to London on the Amir's territorial rights. There seemed no doubt that Badghiz (the Place of Winds) had belonged to Herat from time immemorial. Evidence of this was to be found in the records of Hsuan-Tsang¹ in the seventh century A.D., in the Arab histories, in the firmans of Timur at the end of the fourteenth century, and by successive records down to 1873, when the ownership of Badghiz by Afghanistan was in substance admitted by Prince Gorchakov.² Lumsden went on to deal with the recent ownership of the Panjdeh oasis, a district of Badghiz, stretching northwards towards Merv along both sides of the Murghab River, and proved without a shadow of doubt that if Panjdeh belonged to anybody it belonged to the Amir to whom even the Sarik Turkmen paid tribute.³ But even so, it was a shadowy ownership, an ownership based on the payment of occasional tribute to the Afghan Governor of Herat, who seems otherwise to have had little jurisdiction over an outlying oasis and an alien people. It was at least possible that in upholding the Afghan right to Panjdeh we were endeavouring to place on the Amir's shoulders an

¹ See Pt. I, Ch. III.

² Sir Peter Lumsden to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, dated 27 January 1885.

³ Ibid.

obligation 'which he could not in practice adequately fulfil'. The matter, however, never reached the stage of an argument over legal rights and political expediency. In November 1884 the Russians pushed forward to Pul-i-Khatun on the Hari Rud and to within twelve miles of the Afghan outposts at Ak Tepe in Panjdeh. Tempers were rising on both sides, the Russian local commander wrote to his Afghan opposite number calling him a liar and a coward, to which General Ghaus-ud-din in his reply added the epithet of thief. Lumsden reproved him for 'imitating the unpolite language used by the Russian Colonel',¹ but tension was obviously increasing as the Russians moved gradually forward. There was a lull during the winter months, while the two Governments maintained a steady flow of argument as to the merits of their respective attitudes. In March 1885 the tension spread so as to include both the Governments and people of Britain and Russia. The possibility of a rupture began to be talked of; on 14 March the British Ambassador, Sir Edward Thornton, informed M. de Giers that a Russian attack on Panjdeh would put an end to any possibility of negotiations between the two countries, and might lead to the most disastrous consequences. On 28 March he emphasized that any attempt on the part of the Russian troops to approach or occupy Herat would be equivalent to a declaration of war, and would be accepted as such by Her Majesty's Government. M. de Giers said he had no information whatever of any proposal to attack Panjdeh, and that the Russians had not the slightest intention of moving on Herat.² On the 30th the long-expected blow fell. The Russians attacked and defeated the Afghan force holding Panjdeh. The Afghans fought well but lost heavily and were driven back to Maruchak, while the Russians occupied the Panjdeh oasis.³ Further telegrams received on 9 April showed that although Russians had deliberately advanced about twenty-five miles almost to within range of the Afghan post, the Afghans had moved the bulk of their force across the river to meet them. There had in effect been provocation on both sides, sufficient to give the Russians a peg on which to hang a justification of their actions. This was per-

¹ *Correspondence respecting the Demarcation of N.W. Afghanistan*, Part II, p. 55. India Office Records.

² *Ibid.*, Part III, p. 31.

³ Sir Peter Lumsden to the Secretary of State, telegram dated 1 April but not received till the 7th. *Ibid.*, Part III, p. 43.

haps a good thing, for without it there would surely have been war, and no one wanted to go to war over the ownership of the Panjdeh oasis. But all through April the danger of war was imminent, not so much on account of the Panjdeh affair itself, as because it seemed to foreshadow in the popular view a further Russian advance.

The Russian press was almost unanimous in its jubilation over the incident and in its bellicose attitude towards Great Britain; while one of the leading journals, the *Novosti*, took for granted that Russia could not recede, but must press on to seize Herat and so 'pierce a window' looking south-eastward. She would find in Herat a convenient halting-place for a still further advance towards the Indian Ocean in fulfilment of her historic destiny.¹ On the British side feeling was equally intense. In the House of Commons Mr. Gladstone asked for a vote of credit for war purposes,² while two army corps were mobilized in India. Sir Peter Lumsden, meanwhile, sent off his engineers post-haste to Herat to concert measures of defence with the Afghan commanders. Permission to enter the city and examine the fortifications was received from the Amir; the British party was received with honour, and their report, which included the recommendation that the famous Musalla of Gauhar Shah should be destroyed, showed that a month's work would render Herat defensible.

In London and St. Petersburg, however, both Governments were seeking a way out of the crisis. The Russians in their clumsy, blundering way had got their immediate objective, a foothold on the northern glacis of the Hindu Kush and control of the Sarik Turkmen. In doing so they had stirred the Government and people of Britain to the brink of war, and now realized that an advance to Herat, the outer bastion of India's defences, would plunge both countries into the abyss. And so they stopped, as the Russians usually do when opposed with genuine determination. They sought a means of consolidating their position without loss of face, and soon found that once the initial excitement had died away Mr. Gladstone's Government was quite ready to meet them half-way. A compromise was arranged whereby the question of which side had violated the agreement not to move forward from positions held on 16 March was to be referred to 'the

¹ *Ibid.*, Part III, p. 60.

² *Hansard*, 3rd series, Vol. 297, p. 847.

judgement of the head of a friendly state',¹ and the negotiations for the general line the frontier should take were transferred to London.²

On this, Sir Peter Lumsden, whose position had been rendered most invidious by the successful Russian encroachments up both the Hari Rud and the Murghab Rivers, asked leave to withdraw the Commission, and expressed his views on the situation with some force.³ He was allowed to return home and Colonel (afterwards Sir West) Ridgeway took his place, the Commission remaining in a state of suspended animation, while negotiations went on in London. These were based on the general proposal that the Russians would exchange Zulfiqar on the Hari Rud for Panjdeh, the Zulfiqar Pass being the most southerly point they had reached, and that this would be the starting-point for the line. This proposal proved satisfactory to the Amir,⁴ and on 10 September 1885 Lord Salisbury, who on a change of Government had returned to the Foreign Office, and the Russian Ambassador, M. de Staal, signed the protocol laying down in general though precise terms the Russo-Afghan frontier line from Zulfiqar on the Hari Rud to Khwaja Salih on the Oxus.⁵

Anyone who reads the correspondence dealing with these negotiations, and particularly the bitter comments of the man on the spot, Sir Peter Lumsden, may easily derive the impression that the British Government submitted to a severe diplomatic defeat in order to avert war, and that the Russians by a policy of bluff and aggression secured an advantageous strategic frontier and lands to which the possession of Merv gave them no title. This is to some extent true, but it must be remembered that whatever the moral rights of the case may have been, the hard physical fact was that we were in a very weak position. A Russian move on Herat had failed in 1838 and it seemed possible, if not probable, that Herat was still their objective. If it was we could not possibly stop them by force. Russian forces would have been in Herat before the British could reach Qandahar, and the Afghans could hardly have held them off as they did the

¹ The King of Denmark undertook this task.

² Lord Granville to M. de Staal, 24 April 1885; see also his letter of 4 May. *Demarcation of N.W. Afghanistan*, Part III.

³ Sir Peter Lumsden to the Secretary of State, 15 April 1885. *Ibid.*

⁴ *Vide* enclosure to Secret Letter from India to the Secretary of State No. 69, dated 4 May 1885. India Office Records.

⁵ See *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII, No. VII.

Persians forty-seven years before. The only possible way to stop the Russians was to make it abundantly clear that a move on Herat meant war with Britain, and having made this clear to negotiate and if necessary give way a little in matters of detail.

The result has justified the political strategy of the time. The demarcation of the line from Zulfiqar proceeded smoothly as far as the Oxus. There was an unfortunate hitch at the very end which was not without a touch of comedy but which at an earlier stage might have been fatal. In 1872 the British Government, basing their opinion on a report by Alexander Burnes, written forty years earlier, that on his way to Bukhara from Balkh he had crossed the Oxus at a spot named 'Khoja Salih' or 'Haji Salih', informed the Russian Government that this place represented the limit of the Amir's possessions on the left bank of the Oxus. The Russians accepted the British definition of the Amir's boundaries which held the field till they came under examination thirteen years later. It was then discovered that the Afghan boundary with Bukhara had been fixed and delimited by Afghan and Bukharan officials some ten years earlier, that it did not correspond with the British definition, that no spot named 'Khoja Salih' existed, and that to make matters worse, 'the point at issue is greatly complicated by the fact that "Khoja Salih" is indifferently termed a ford, a ferry, a village or villages, a post and a point, in the correspondence terminating with the Agreement of 1873'.¹

The Russians took immediate advantage of the situation. Although the Afghan boundary was in fact well known it did not correspond to the boundary agreed on in 1872, and it consequently gave the Russians a useful bargaining counter. The Commission reached a deadlock and in September 1886 broke up, leaving a gap in the boundary from Dukchi to the Oxus, a distance of some fifty miles.² Negotiations were resumed in St. Petersburg in the following April and ended in July in a compromise which gave to Afghanistan the fertile Oxus district in return for certain adjustments in the Panjdeh area. But the final solution had not been easily reached. By the time the Committee broke up the Russians had realized for the first time

¹ Colonel Sir West Ridgeway to the Marquis of Salisbury, 1 February 1886. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 63.

² The British Ambassador to the Secretary of State, 20 August 1886. *Ibid.*

how rich were the Oxus lands,¹ and how the boundary to which, in their ignorance, they had agreed in 1873 divided a country both halves of which might well have formed part of the Russian Empire. They realized in fact but fortunately too late the real significance of this northern glacis of the Hindu Kush. Consequently when Ridgeway reopened negotiations in St. Petersburg he found that, while the Russian Foreign Office were anxious to come to an agreement, the military party were against it. The latter were well aware that should negotiations finally break down the Russian Government, freed from their obligations not to interfere in Afghanistan, would immediately seize the rich lands of Balkh and Badakhshan. For a time negotiations approached a deadlock, but the 'unflinching loyalty' of the Foreign Minister, M. de Giers,² and the intervention of the Tsar turned the scale. The protocol embodying the final agreement was signed on 22 July 1887.³

In commenting on the settlement Sir West Ridgeway expressed the opinion that it would not be lasting. Afghan rule on the northern watershed of the Hindu Kush was disliked and feared by the Turki-speaking inhabitants of this area. By the natural law of political gravitation the two great Empires were fated to be limitrophe, and whether we liked it or not a partition of Afghanistan between Russia and Britain was inevitable.⁴ This comment came from the man on the spot who had been chiefly responsible for the erection of the first and most vital part of the framework of stability on which henceforth the peace of Asia was to depend. But being the man on the spot he was not in a position to gauge the effect on the Governments and people chiefly concerned of a stabilized frontier, violation of which would be a breach of international law. The barrier itself was flimsy enough but the moral obligations which supported it were strong and would grow stronger.

In the meantime, however, while the framework was still incomplete, the stresses and strains to which it was subjected were great. Rumour and report of intended aggression persisted. A visit paid by the Amir to the northern provinces in 1888 to

¹ Colonel Sir West Ridgeway to the Secretary of State, 27 July 1887. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 63.

² The British Ambassador to the Secretary of State, 22 July 1887. *Ibid.*

³ Colonel Sir West Ridgeway to the Secretary of State, 27 July 1887; see also *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII, No. IX (Afghanistan).

⁴ Final report by Sir West Ridgeway to the Secretary of State, July 1887.

suppress internal rebellion lent colour to reports that the Afghans had designs on Kerki on the Oxus, while rumours of a projected violation of the Panjdeh boundary by General Komarov caused the British Ambassador of St. Petersburg to repeat, at the beginning of 1889, his warning that a Russian advance on Herat would entail a state of war between Russia and Great Britain. A declaration of pacific intentions by both sides led to a relaxation of tension and in 1891 attention was switched to the other end of the long frontier line, where a Russian exploration party was endeavouring to annex Wakhan. This attempt to outflank the frontier agreed on in 1873, which had left a gap between the source of the Oxus in Lake Victoria or Zar Kul and the Chinese frontier on the Pamirs, had to be thwarted at all costs. The negotiations which then followed led by stages to the adjustment of all differences between the agreement of 1873 and the actual situation. A visit to Kabul in 1893 by Sir Mortimer Durand, the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, led very quickly to the consent of Abdur Rahman to surrender certain lands across the Oxus in exchange for an outlying portion of Bukharan territory on the south bank.¹ He also agreed though with reluctance to assume control of the inhospitable valley of Wakhan in the north-east corner of his dominions. The Government of India paid him half a lakh of rupees (£5,000) a year to meet the cost of administration. It was from their point of view a moderate price to pay to secure the north-eastern end of the Hindu Kush against Russian penetration.

But the boundary to the east of Lake Victoria had still to be defined. Somewhere in that wild unknown country it would meet the western limits of the Chinese Empire, and for two years the British Government made every effort to secure Chinese participation in the proposed agreement. This, however, proved to be impossible within any practical limit of time, and in March 1895 an exchange of letters between the Russian Ambassador and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs embodied the agreement for the demarcation of the line, and specifically mentioned that neither Government should exercise any political influence or control across the line from their respective territories.²

Demarcation on the spot was undertaken by a joint Commission

¹ See *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII, No. XI (Afghanistan).

² *Op cit.*, Nos. XVII and XVIII (Afghanistan).

in the summer of 1895. No major difficulties arose in fixing a line which followed the crest of the mountain ridge first south and then eastward from Lake Victoria, till it reached the valley of the Aqsu River which it followed eastward for two miles. Thence it turned south-east for a short space of six miles which required pillar demarcation. From the sixth mile a rugged and inaccessible spur of the Sarikol Range carried the boundary into regions of perpetual ice and snow to its junction with the main range. The northern frontier of Afghanistan was now complete and precisely laid down, save for an exact definition of the position of the boundary along the Oxus, an omission which gave rise to frequent disputes until in 1946 a Russo-Afghan agreement defined it as the *thalweg* or mid-channel of the river.

But the framework of stability in Central Asia had now been erected. Not only that but it had been erected on the historic line of the Oxus, resting on the mountains of the Hindu Kush, along the line which had so often in the past guarded the approaches to India from the barbarians of the north. Would this framework hold against the strains and stresses of imperial policies, and grow stronger as the years went on, or would it give way and let yet another wave of invasion and conquest surge round and over the great barrier?

Throughout these long negotiations the Amir, Abdur Rahman, played the subordinate role assigned to him with success. He gave every assistance to the British Commissioners during the demarcation of the north-western boundaries and received Sir West Ridgeway with much hospitality in Kabul on his return journey to India. At the time of the Panjdeh incident the Amir happened rather fortunately to be the guest of the Viceroy, the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, at Rawalpindi in the Panjab. The impression made on him by the courtesy of his hosts, who included the Duke of Connaught, and by the review of troops of the Rawalpindi garrison, was profound. At the end of a state *darbar* held on 8 April he asked permission to say a few words :

I am deeply sensible [he said] of the kindness I have received from His Excellency the Viceroy, and of the favour shown me by Her Majesty the Queen Empress. In return for this kindness and favour I am ready with my army and my people to render any services which may be required of me or of the Afghan Nation. As the British Government has declared that it will assist me in repelling any foreign enemies so

it is right and proper that Afghanistan should unite in the firmest manner, and stand side by side with the British Government.¹

This spontaneous declaration of alliance was received 'with some surprise and applause',² but was undoubtedly the outcome of genuine goodwill which, as we have already seen, personal contact between the head of the Afghan nation and the British rulers of India invariably evoked. The same evening the Viceroy learnt of the Russian attack on Panjdeh and passed on the unwelcome news to his guest,

who showed less emotion than might have been expected. He declared his determination to resist to the utmost any invasion of Afghan territory . . . and while most anxious to avoid war and arrive at an amicable settlement with Russia on the boundary question, he asserts that his people will fight desperately in defence of their families and country.³

The fact is that Abdur Rahman was a statesman with a knowledge of the Russians and a very shrewd idea of what was and was not possible in his dealings with them. His hold on the Sariks of Panjdeh was tenuous and he had no desire to add a section of so turbulent a people as the Turkmen to the many races already inside his boundaries. There were certain points along his north-western frontier such as Zulfiqar and Maruchak which he was determined to retain. When he learnt that the proposed line gave him these he accepted the loss of others with the utmost goodwill.⁴

In addition he had little time for external affairs. The first twelve years of his reign were gravely troubled by internal dissension as one leading section after another of the unruly peoples of Afghanistan challenged the Amir's authority. In 1881 Ayub Khan from Herat declared a holy war against Abdur Rahman for his friendship with the British and occupied Qandahar. His defeat and the reoccupation of Herat enabled the Amir to assert against the Russians his claim to an equitable frontier beyond the Paropamisus Mountains. Two years later the Shinwaris of the Eastern Province, whose habitat lies across the trade route to

¹ The Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, telegram dated 13 April 1885. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 87.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The Amir of Afghanistan to the Viceroy of India, dated 17 May 1885. *Ibid.*

India, reached a pitch of lawlessness which rendered the main road unsafe for a period to travellers and to the caravans of commerce. They had hardly been subdued when the powerful Ghilzai clan broke into open rebellion, which lasted for nearly two years. In 1888 the northern provinces revolted and in 1891 the Hazarahs followed suit. All these uprisings were dealt with in turn, order was restored, and the leaders crushed with implacable severity. When in 1893 Sir Mortimer Durand led a mission to Kabul to discuss boundary questions¹ with the Amir the country was in a more tranquil state than it had ever been. The Hon. George Curzon,² who was a guest of the Amir in 1894, has left on record a vivid impression of this remarkable man, who could be so affable and courteous and yet was cruel and brutal to a degree unsurpassed by any of his forebears.³ Both Curzon and Durand were struck by his curious contrasts: so shrewd and yet so childish, filled with conceit and ignorance and yet equally filled with a strange sardonic humour which never deserted him. Like many Afghans he was a great though not always truthful raconteur and laughed uproariously at his own stories, at the same time he could be most thoughtful and generous to those who served him well.

Voltaire's epigram 'he civilized his people and himself remained a savage' was applied with much truth to Abdur Rahman. He ruled his people with a rod of iron and centralized all departments of Government under his personal control. While he educated his eldest son and successor, Habibullah, in the art of government, and put him in charge of some of the affairs of state, he wisely avoided the great mistake made by many of his predecessors of entrusting the government of outlying provinces to relatives and possible rivals. He promoted loyal subordinates to high posts while at the same time he instituted a system of spies and informers which enabled him to become aware of all possible intrigues against himself. The shadow of his authority lay heavily across the lives of all his subjects. His punishment of evil-doers was drastic and brutal. He hung robbers in cages on the scene of their misdeeds and left them to perish of cold and hunger, he tortured and stoned to death criminals, and nailed

¹ See Ch. X.

² Afterwards the Marquis Curzon of Kedleston, Viceroy of India.

³ See Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, *Tales of Travel*, Ch. III.

the ears of unjust tradesmen to the doors of their shops in the bazar. He was cruel by nature, terrifying in his anger, and implacable in the sternness with which he treated his subjects. But it may truly be said that they got the Government they deserved. No rule less drastic could have welded this lawless people into the semblance of a nation, and while the Amir treated his people with the utmost severity, he laboured hard and unceasingly for the good of his country. He reorganized the administration and sought to develop the resources of his state. He introduced with caution European engineers to build workshops and to advise on irrigation ; he developed communications and made the country safe for travellers and merchants. And above all he gave to his people a unity which they had not previously enjoyed, and which paved the way for the attainment of complete independence achieved by his grandson some twenty years after his death. In the last few years of his life he suffered increasingly from gout, which towards the end rendered him almost helpless and from which he died in September 1901.

(3)

Abdur Rahman's qualities as a great administrator were of much value to the British Government in the years following the demarcation of the northern boundary of Afghanistan. The 'buffer state' became a buffer in more than name ; it began to represent something stable, which owed its strength primarily to the Amir's determination to keep all foreigners at arm's length, and secondly to the remote but solid support of Britain. It was not a boundary lightly to be infringed.

It was, however, a boundary which could be outflanked. We have seen how sixty years earlier the Russians had attempted to obtain a footing on the western flank of the Hindu Kush by supporting Persian efforts to seize Herat.¹ The attempt had failed and had not been repeated. But now that the Russian frontiers east of the Caspian were conterminous with Persia, Russian influence was penetrating into Khurasan, and through the agency of a forceful consulate-general at Meshed was extending southward into Sistan. Already in 1899 Lord Curzon's Govern-

¹ Pt. II, Ch. V.

ment had drawn attention to this threat to the north-western approaches to India, and to the centripetal progress of Russian influence in Persia, where

within the limits of a nominally still existing integrity and independence so many encroachments upon both those attributes are possible, that by almost imperceptible degrees they pass into the realm of constitutional fiction, where they may continue to provide an exercise for the speculations of the jurist, long after they have been contemptuously ignored by statesmen.¹

The Government of India went on to make the suggestion, mooted in official shape for the first time and afterwards adopted as the basis of negotiations with Russia, of the division of Persia into spheres of influence. Her Majesty's Government did not think the moment opportune for such a move,² nor indeed was any *rapprochement* with Russia possible during and for some time after the Boer War (1899-1902) when British unpopularity in Europe reached perhaps its highest level.

In the meantime, the situation on the Afghan border continued unstable. The Russian declaration of 1873 that the territories of the Amir were completely outside their sphere of influence was made at a time when the boundaries of the country directly administered by Russia were still a long way from the Amir's frontiers. Their boundaries now touched and the position had consequently changed. It was anomalous and indeed intolerable that the only communication between the frontier officials of the two countries should be by way of St. Petersburg and London. In 1900 the Russian Government expressed a desire to establish direct relations of a non-political nature with the Afghan Government. The Government of India took fright at this suggestion, which, in their opinion, might so easily lead to the establishment of Russian political or diplomatic agencies in the country, thereby nullifying the exclusive rights hitherto exercised by the British Government of controlling the Amir's external policy. Her Majesty's Government agreed generally with this view and managed to keep the whole matter in abeyance till the Amir's death in 1901 put an end for a period to further discussions.

¹ The Government of India to the Secretary of State for India in Council, 21 September 1899. Gooch and Temperley, *British Documents on the Origin of the War (1914-18)*, Vol. IV, p. 359.

² Lord G. Hamilton to the Government of India, 6 July 1900. *Op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 363.

But the position continued to give rise to anxiety. Not only was this the case in Persia and Afghanistan, but even at the furthest end of India's long frontier line where it abuts on Tibet the movement of British officials in the Chumbi Valley of Sikkim formed the subject of a minatory protest from St. Petersburg.

This was in 1903, a year before the Younghusband expedition to Lhasa. In October of the same year the British Chargé d'Affaires in St. Petersburg summed up in one sentence the correspondence on Afghanistan of the previous three years—'Russia has notified her intention of sending, when she pleases, her agents into Afghanistan.'¹ This was most disconcerting, and the tone of the communication with which the Russian Foreign Office closed the correspondence so discourteous ² that a strongly worded reply was sent to the British Ambassador for communication to the Russian Government. This reply, which contained not only a defence of British conduct but also an indictment of that of the Russian Government, was never delivered. A few days after it had been sent to St. Petersburg in November 1903 the Russian Ambassador in London opened conversations with the British Government of so conciliatory a nature as to pave the way for an eventual settlement of Anglo-Russian differences on all points affecting the defence of India's land frontiers.³ It is not altogether easy to account for this sudden volte-face. The influence of King Edward had something to do with it, as also had the personality of the Russian Ambassador, Count Benckendorf, a pronounced Anglophil. There was probably also a dawning realization in Russian official circles that the British were strong in Southern Asia and inclined to be co-operative elsewhere, and that there was another power in Europe which though friendly enough at the moment might well be a menace to world peace before long.

Whatever the reason, these conversations had not produced any concrete proposals when they were interrupted by the Russo-Japanese War. They were resumed in 1906 when the shattering effect of the war on Russian prestige, coupled with internal unrest, opened the way for an Anglo-Russian entente to counteract growing German domination in Europe.⁴ The moment was opportune. The Tsar expressed a wish to see the King. The

¹ Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 519. ² Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 621. ³ Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 187.

⁴ B. H. Sumner, *The Raleigh Lecture on History*, 1940.

British Chargé d'Affaires suggested that such a meeting, if it could be arranged, would be like visiting a man just declared bankrupt.¹ But the risk would have been too great in a country seething with unrest. Instead the British Ambassador, Sir Arthur Nicolson, opened formal negotiations three months later, in June 1906, with the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Isvolski, intended to place Anglo-Russian relations in regard to Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet on a firm and durable basis.²

Negotiations lasted till the end of August 1907, when a Convention was signed in St. Petersburg, covering all major points of difference between the two countries. Persia was divided into spheres of influence in such a manner as to guard Sistan and the western frontier of Afghanistan from Russian encroachment. At the other end of the line both powers undertook to recognize Chinese suzerainty over Tibet and not to seek entry into that country. In the centre the approaches to the Hindu Kush were guarded by a formal Russian declaration that she considered Afghanistan as outside the sphere of Russian influence, would send no agents into the country, and would deal through the British Government in all political matters relating to Afghanistan. On the British side His Majesty's Government undertook not to annex or occupy any part of Afghanistan or to interfere in the internal administration of the country provided the Amir adhered to the engagements entered into with his father and reaffirmed in 1905.³

These negotiations are looked on as a classical example of successful diplomacy. They were carried through with unwearying patience on both sides for close on eighteen months, and when they were completed King Edward, no mean diplomat himself, referred to them in a letter to the Foreign Office as placing Nicolson 'in the front rank of our Diplomats'.⁴ But of the two M. Isvolski had the harder part to play. He had to reconcile to his policy not only his own subordinates at home but also Russian representatives in Persia, who never altogether abandoned their dream of a predominating Russian influence

¹ Mr. Spring Rice to Sir Edward Grey, 15 March 1906. Gooch and Temperley, Vol. IV, p. 227.

² Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 237.

³ The full text of the Convention is given in Gooch and Temperley, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 618.

⁴ For an account of the part played by Sir Arthur Nicolson in the framing of this Convention, see *The Life of Lord Carnock*, by Harold Nicolson.

throughout the whole of Persia. More difficult still was the opposition of the General Staff, an opposition which derived some at any rate of its force from genuine fear of British aggression against Russia's Central Asian possessions. We find for instance the Chief of the General Staff, General Palitsyn, suggesting to the British Military Attaché that so strong a Muhammadan power as the British might 'at some future time, when we were in disagreement with Russia, raise the Muhammadans against them, and hurl the Afghans against their borders'.¹ Such a notion may seem fantastic to those who are so imbued with the idea of the peaceful defensive objectives of British statesmen as to believe that all other nations must view our policy in the same light as we do ourselves. The discovery that this is by no means the case is one of the sad though perhaps wholesome lessons which experiences abroad very soon teach British diplomats. It is not very many years since the present writer heard a Russian diplomat in Kabul express surprise and relief on learning that there were no British bombing aircraft in India at the time capable of making the journey to Tashkent and back, and there is no doubt that the Russians have always been as much afraid of us in Central Asia as we have been of them. The military clique in St. Petersburg feared us and they also feared to give up to Britain control of the great highways from Central Asia to India by Herat or further westward by Sistan. It took eighteen months of most skilful diplomacy on both sides to bring the matter to a successful conclusion. And when the Kaiser read the Convention he noted on the dispatch: 'Yes, when taken all round it is aimed at us.'²

In addition to the Kaiser there was another potentate who disliked the Convention. In 1901 Abdur Rahman's eldest son, Habibullah, succeeded his father as Amir of Afghanistan. Habibullah, though by no means a weak ruler, was a far less dominating personality than his father, and it is a tribute to the discipline which the latter had impressed upon his subjects that the succession passed without bloodshed. There was, however, a strong anti-British element at the Amir's Court, headed by his brother Nasrullah, and as we have seen Russian pretensions to direct

¹ Lt.-Col. Napier to Sir A. Nicolson, 27 April 1907. Gooch and Temperley, Vol. IV, p. 530.

² Friedrich Thienne, *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, Vol. XXV, No. 8357.

dealings with Kabul were increasing. The maintenance of the buffer state under British suzerainty was becoming precarious, and it was essential to do something to restore our position in Kabul and to renew with Habibullah the mutual undertakings exchanged between the Government of India and Abdur Rahman.¹

Lord Curzon, who was then Viceroy, thought that the best way to bring this about was by a meeting between himself and the new Amir. But Habibullah was doubtful about leaving Kabul before his position was fully secured, and was possibly also rather frightened of Lord Curzon. He refused an invitation which was very little short of a command, but in spite of Russian overtures continued to show a desire for friendship with the British Government. In consequence it was decided to send a mission headed by Mr. (later Sir Louis) Dane to Kabul to discuss outstanding questions and regulate British relations with the Amir.

This mission reached Kabul at the end of 1904. Mr. Dane carried with him a positive portfolio of instructions as to the manner in which he should conduct the negotiations and the various requirements necessary for a satisfactory understanding with the Afghan Government. The Government of India intended to embody the more vital of these in a treaty, while the remainder should be brought together in the form of an agreement or through an exchange of notes.

But Dane's proposals did not meet Afghan views at all. The Amir and his advisers had been much impressed by Japanese victories over the Russian armies in the Far East. They wanted the British to join them at once in an attack on Russia, and to engage in an elaborate scheme of military co-operation which would have involved the construction of a railway into southern Afghanistan and British co-operation in the defence of Qandahar and other posts. This was the forward policy with a vengeance and was of course completely at variance with the trend of British relations with Russia. When the Afghans found that Dane was not prepared to negotiate on the lines they proposed, their attitude changed from cordiality to suspicion and resentment. They withdrew all suggestions of military co-operation and whittled down their proposals to a bare re-statement of the obligations entered into by Abdur Rahman whereby Afghan foreign relations remained in British control.

¹ See Pt. II, Ch. IX (1).

Lord Curzon's Government, with strange lack of vision, were anxious to abandon the negotiations since, in their opinion, the terms offered by the Amir were dangerous to the interests of India and fatal to British prestige in Afghanistan. Fortunately for the peace of Asia His Majesty's Government were able to take a wider view of the situation. They pointed out that Habibullah still offered them control of his foreign relations. With the Russian menace before them such an offer seemed well worth while, and in spite of vehement protests from India His Majesty's Government insisted on the acceptance of the Amir's proposals. The treaty was signed on 21 March 1905; it secured to the British Government full control of Afghan foreign relations in return for a subsidy of 18 lakhs of rupees a year (£160,000) and permission to the Amir to import munitions through India.¹

The results were meagre when compared with the long array of subjects proposed for negotiation by the Government of India, but they paid a very handsome dividend. We have already seen how important it is when dealing with Afghans to secure the goodwill of the ruler, and in making demands to avoid bureaucratic rigidity or an insistence on a high standard of international morality which is beyond his power to enforce. It was fortunate that this point of view prevailed on the present occasion, and that narrow questions of prestige, a word so little understood and yet so frequently used, were not allowed to thwart the attainment of the main objective. The effect produced by this treaty paved the way for the Amir's visit to India in 1907 where the goodwill as well as the power of his great neighbour and the courtesy and charm of his hosts, Lord and Lady Minto, impressed themselves most strongly on his memory. He returned to Afghanistan fully determined to implement to the best of his ability his declared policy of friendship with the British Government. This policy ensured the neutrality of Afghanistan through the dark and difficult days of the First World War.

At the same time he did not like and would have nothing to do with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which was sent him for his concurrence in September of that year. He and his advisers resented the fact that they had not been consulted while negotiations were in progress, they were annoyed at the inclusion in one convention of three separate agreements, and they

¹ The text is given in *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII, No. XXI (Afghanistan).

disliked the subject matter of the Afghan portion. And so, not knowing what to say, they said nothing for a year, to the intense annoyance of Lord Morley, and then replied in a rambling document, which, while not prepared to reject the Convention *in toto*, sought further explanations, since 'to act on a thing which has a thousand losses and not a single benefit is nothing less than suicidal'.

Further negotiations were pursued but without effect. The spirit of nationality, stirring in Asia as a result of the Russo-Japanese War, was beginning to show itself among the Afghan rulers. They refused to give their consent to a document which they held to be derogatory to their dignity and subversive of their independence, and the conditions precedent to the agreement coming into force were consequently unfulfilled. Fortunately the Russian Government agreed in the autumn of 1908 to act on the assumption that the agreement was in force, even though the consent of the Amir had not been received.

Thus equilibrium was at length obtained, so that the Russian Empire found what it had long sought, a stable frontier based on firm foundations, treaties, and duly demarcated boundaries. On the British side the compromise between the forward and the back-to-the-Indus policies was typical of a nation which revelled in compromises, and which had a genius possessed by no other nation for 'getting along somehow' with a situation which defied all laws of logic and rational policy. For as we shall shortly see, out of the policy which solved the major problem by stabilizing the true Indian frontier through a species of remote control, there arose a minor problem, the problem of tribal areas on the Indo-Afghan borders. This problem which has since distracted successive British Governments of India and remains to vex and possibly to destroy their successors did not, however, disturb the architects of the Anglo-Russian boundaries. They were settling a question which if not solved would have threatened the peace of the world; beside it the problem of the Indo-Afghan boundary was a local affair of scant significance, about which they knew little and cared less.

Chapter X

THE PROBLEM OF THE TRIBES

I MUST now turn aside for a brief space to consider a matter which is closely connected with the story of the Hindu Kush, and which has assumed some importance due mainly to the stubbornness with which the problems arising from it have resisted solution.

In an earlier chapter of this work I have described the origins of the Pathan or true Afghan so far as it has been possible to ascertain them.¹ Elsewhere I have noted briefly such facts as are known about their history prior to their entry on the scene as rulers of a great empire.² The outstanding characteristics of the Pathans as gleaned from these scant early records are their fierce and warlike nature, their fanatical disposition, and their passionate love of freedom. These characteristics were particularly marked in those sections of the Pathan race whose permanent dwelling-place lay in or beyond the ranges which fringe the northern side of the Indus Valley. The sections of Pathans, which penetrated or were pushed into the lower levels of the Indus Valley, lost through prolonged residence in a more enervating climate, and in a more vulnerable locality, something of the fierce love of freedom which characterized their brethren of the hills.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, when the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh took advantage of the internecine strife which was disrupting the Afghan Empire to advance across the Indus and extend their control over the whole Peshawar Valley and the Derajat, several of the Pathan tribes fell under their sway. It was, however, an unstable control. The Sikh rulers formed part of a warrior system wholly based on military requirements, and little versed in civil administration. They ruled as a small minority over a Muhammadan people who only endured their rule because they lacked the cohesion and the military discipline to overcome it. The records of such travellers as Charles Masson and Alexander Burnes, who passed through the

¹ Pt. II, Ch. I.

² See for instance Pt. I, Ch. V.

Derajat and the Peshawar Valley at about this time, attest the lawless condition of the people and the inability of the Sikhs to control the inhabitants much beyond the limits of their military cantonments. In such a form Sikh rule over the northern Panjab, as the trans-Indus country was then termed, could not have long survived the death of Ranjit Singh. Had not the British intervened his empire would soon have split into its component parts, and in all probability the Afghan ruler, Dost Muhammad, would have recovered the lost lands of his fore-runners, at any rate as far as the Indus.

But as we have seen, the British were still moving forward. In 1843 they overran and annexed Sind and in 1849 after the defeat of the Sikhs they took over the whole Panjab including the trans-Indus territories up to the foothills bordering on the Amir's dominion.

The pacification of Sind by Brigadier-General John Jacob in about 1850 and the subsequent settlement of the whole of Baluchistan from the Gumal River to the Persian frontier by Sir Robert Sandeman need not long detain us. Both Jacob and Sandeman were outstanding administrators who, once they had overcome the initial lawlessness of the Baluchis and other tribes of this part of the frontier, found the task of establishing order and setting up a loose administration one of no great difficulty. They had two powerful factors in their favour. The first was that the majority of the inhabitants of Baluchistan are not Pathan. They are of mixed race, some being descended from the Arab invaders of the ninth century, others being of Persian origin, and there are traces too of older races of Dravidian stock. They are less fanatical and pugnacious than the Pathan, and they have the additional merit from an administrative point of view of an organization which centres on a chief whose authority the tribesmen respect and obey. Control of such an organization, once the tribal chiefs are won over, is no very difficult matter. The second factor which makes for stability in Baluchistan is that the races of this area do not extend very far across the mountains into the plains of southern Afghanistan. These arid lands south of the Gumal River and east of Qandahar are sparsely populated, mainly by Ghilzais and by wandering Pathans of the Achakzai tribe with whom the Baluchis have little or nothing in common. There is in consequence no bolt-hole to the west and little or

no support for recalcitrant tribesmen from sympathizers in Afghanistan.

Far different is the case in the area extending north-eastward from the Gumal River. Here we find in a stretch of mountainous country 225 miles long an agglomeration of tribes of Pathan origin, owning in some cases a shadowy allegiance to the rulers in Kabul, but in essence masterless, lawless, and fanatical; held together by a certain code of tribal customs and the loose control of the tribal *jirga* or council, but in the main freemen, impatient of any rigid social contract and violently opposed to any infringement of their liberty of thought or action; divided and split by the devastating scourge of the blood feud, and united only in a fierce determination to defend themselves and their country from all forms of external pressure. Nowhere in the world are to be found better fighters among their own rugged hills than the Pathans, and in few places will a stranger who comes in peace and is received among them as a guest find a more courteous and hospitable welcome. They are a strange, unruly people. Their brethren of the south and west of Afghanistan, on whom fell the task of shaping the destinies of their kingdom, have shown that contact with the world brings out in the Pathan a latent spark of administrative genius and power of rulership. But those who have remained sheltering in the great tangle of hills which lie between the Hindu Kush and the Indus, untouched by the civilizing influences of their more cultured neighbours, demand from the world nothing save to live in freedom, to fight among themselves, and to prey upon their neighbours even as they have always done.

The Sikhs made no attempt to come to terms with the Pathans of the hills, but established their frontiers along the edge of the tribal lands where the cultivated fields of the plain give place to stony barren slopes running up to the rugged brown hills beyond. It was this frontier that the British took over in 1849.

For some years the new rulers of the trans-Indus frontier were too occupied with the task of building up an administration inside their borders to pay much attention to what lay beyond. While at the same time the attitude of John Lawrence, the head of the new Panjab administration, towards the question of retaining the trans-Indus territories at all was sufficiently doubtful to counter any idea of a forward policy beyond the administered

borders which fate and the Sikhs had assigned to the British. Still it was not possible wholly to ignore the great problem which already was beginning to take shape. Thus we find the Commissioner of Peshawar, Herbert Edwardes, writing to his friend Peter Lumsden, in Qandahar, in the autumn of 1857 :

The Amir of Kabul is carrying on a diplomatic war with me about the hill tribes here, whom he claims as his subjects, and wants me to make no arrangements with them except through him. Fancy the Khyberees his subjects ! I tell him he ran away from them last January, and his giving them Mowajibs [allowances] without taking revenue is just blackmail and proves that the Khyberees are independent as they say they are themselves.¹

Here already we find the germ of the dispute which was so often in the future to embitter Anglo-Afghan relations. What was the status of the hill tribes ? By nationality they were Afghans, and they lived within the boundaries of what was left of the Empire of Ahmad Shah Durrani. The Afghan claim to all the territory lying west of the Indus was extinguished when the British took some of it from the Sikhs and held it by right of conquest. But Dost Muhammad's right to sovereignty over all the lands and peoples lying west of the old Sikh frontier could hardly have been disputed, had he possessed the power to enforce his will and establish his rule over these wild and warlike people of the hills. His inability to do so led to the tribes being known then and for many succeeding years as 'independent', which they certainly were in fact, though possibly not juridically.

As such the 'independent' tribes and the British administrators of north-western India fought and bickered and made peace, only to fight again as economic distress and the love of loot drove the tribesmen down from their hills to ravage the rich plains of the northern Panjab. In the early fifties the Panjab Frontier Force, shortly to win fame at the siege of Delhi, was raised as an armed body under civilian control to deal with the raiders of the marches. They were as efficient a body of men as ever rode 'at the tail of a border thief', or blockaded a recalcitrant tribe, but no power on earth save conquest and disarmament could in the course of a century have so altered the character and condition of the tribesmen as to render them peaceful

¹ General Sir Peter Lumsden, *Lumsden of the Guides*.

neighbours to their kinsmen on the plains. In the thirty years between the British occupation of the frontier and the Second Afghan War (1849-79) there were thirty-seven expeditions across the administered border. A description of the position in 1876 shows how the Panjab authorities viewed the progress of border pacification.

We succeeded to an inheritance of anarchy, the result of the Sikh management of the Trans-Indus districts. They had ever been in a state of war with the border tribes and even with the people in the interior of the districts. The whole country was studded with forts, each the headquarters of a robber chief, and the revenue was collected by an army or not collected at all. With the introduction of English rule a change was at once apparent, and the border became tranquil in comparison with its condition in the time that had preceded it. But it was not to be expected that the savage and suspicious races in the independent hills should at once accept the new order of things, abandon their predatory habits, and look upon the English successors of their old enemies as their friends. Expedition after expedition was necessary to show each tribe, in turn, the strength of the British Government and the folly of resisting it by force of arms; while, the lesson having been taught, no effort was spared to encourage friendly feelings, and to show the mountaineers that all the British Government insisted upon was the peace of the border. This ensured, the hillmen were as free to come and go and trade within British territory as our own subjects.

That this policy has been successful is proved by the fact that within the last six years but one expedition has been necessary into independent territory, and this took place as far back as 1872. . . .

The frontier tribes are slowly but surely losing their suspicion of and dislike to the British Government.¹

Mr. Griffin was too sanguine. In the three years following the date of this memorandum no fewer than ten punitive expeditions of varying sizes had to be sent across the border. Nor did the optimism of the Panjab Government as to the beneficent effect of their rule on the tribal situation commend itself to the Viceroy, Lord Lytton. Summarizing the whole position in the spring of 1877 he wrote :

I believe that our North-West Frontier presents at this moment a spectacle unique in the world; at least I know of no other spot where,

¹ Memorandum by Mr. (afterwards Sir) Lepel Griffin, officiating Secretary to the Government of the Panjab, October 1876. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 58 of 1878, C. 1898.

after 25 years of peaceful occupation, a great civilized power has obtained so little influence over its semi-savage neighbours, and acquired so little knowledge of them, that the country within a day's ride of its most important garrison is an absolute *terra incognita*, and that there is absolutely no security for British life a mile or two beyond our border.¹

Lord Lytton went on to enumerate a variety of remedies for the existing state of affairs, remedies such as the better enforcement of responsibility for offences committed against the dwellers within the administered border, the disarmament of the civil population, the desirability of achieving permanent results whenever expeditions were sent across the border, the various roles of the military as opposed to the civil defence forces, and similar questions, all of which have a very familiar ring to one whose connexion with the frontier began thirty-three years after Lord Lytton wrote his minute. Why then did these remedies fail, and why was it that in 1877 the head of the Indian administration could appreciate so clearly the apparent solution to the problem of the tribal areas and yet in 1947 the British rulers of India should be obliged to hand over the problem still unsolved to their successors?

The answer to this question lies not in any failure of the frontier administrators, than whom no more devoted and efficient body of men ever existed; it lies in the deep fundamental issues of the great problem of the defence of India which as we have seen were posed for solution in the ten years following 1877 and were solved in a particular way.

I have noted how in 1880 the Viceroy for one instant saw as it were a vision of the true strategic requirements of India's north-west frontier, and having seen it rejected the possibility of the physical occupation by the British of the country which had once been known as India the Less and was now called Afghanistan. We have seen how financial and administrative problems in India and the weight of public opinion at home whittled down the grandiose schemes of the 'forward policy' school of thought into the compromise of the 'buffer state'.² And we may well consider that this compromise solution of the

¹ Minute by the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, 22 April 1877. *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 58 of 1878, C. 1898.

² Pt. II, Ch. IX (1).

imperial problem, however it may have been reached, was the correct solution ; it was correct in that it gave freedom to a brave and independent people, and at the same time interposed between the two great imperial powers a buffer to reduce the friction inseparable from the contacts of limitrophe states.

But however just and sensible this solution may have been it was a compromise ; it was an ingenious device by which the British Government avoided facing up to and assuming the full responsibilities of an imperial destiny. I shall consider at a later stage what are likely to be the future effects of this decision ; for the moment I am concerned with the more immediate reactions to this fateful action of compromising on a vital issue of imperial strategy.

As the Afghan state, under the efficient rule of Abdur Rahman, began to assume a concrete shape and acquire a stability it had never before possessed, so did the question of fixing its frontiers become a matter of importance. I have discussed at some length the process of fixing the vital northern frontier.¹ The important sections of the western frontier with Persia were demarcated in 1872, and in 1888. There remained only the southern and eastern frontiers where for 1,200 miles, extending from the Pamirs to the Persian desert, the Afghan boundaries abutted on territories under either the direct administration or the suzerainty of the Government of India. All along this frontier the Amir was making his presence felt, and while maintaining faithfully his subordinate role in all questions concerning the major problem of his external affairs, was proving himself an uncomfortable neighbour in his relations with his co-religionists and fellow Pathans on the Indo-Afghan borders. As Commander of the Faithful, the Amir of Afghanistan was looked on as the spiritual head of Islam not only in his own country but also to a large extent in north-western India as well, and Abdur Rahman, though anxious to settle his south-eastern boundaries, was also anxious to include under his temporal as well as his spiritual authority as much as possible of the territory occupied by his Islamic followers. And so throughout the eighties he watched with displeasure any tendency on the part of the British to advance their boundaries. He was much disturbed when they, 'having cut a tunnel through the Khojak hill, were pushing the railway

¹ Pt. II, Ch. IX (2).

line into my country, just like pushing a knife into my vitals'.¹ In reply he pushed forward his outposts into Waziristan, threatened the Turis of the Kurram, assumed virtual sovereignty over the Afridis and strengthened his connexion with the Mohmands. If unchecked, his dominion would in a few years have extended to the administered border of India, and threatened Peshawar. In the north-east he disregarded the Government of India's injunction not to meddle with Bajaur and Dir by seizing the district of Asmar. By 1893 relations were becoming increasingly strained, and the settlement of some form of boundary to check these encroachments was becoming urgent.

The outcome was the agreement of 1893,² negotiated and signed by Sir Mortimer Durand and the Amir Abdur Rahman after only a few weeks of discussion. It laid down a boundary as delimited on a map accompanying the agreement, which defined the southern and eastern limits of the Amir's dominions beyond which his authority should not extend. Each party pledged itself not to 'exercise interference' in the territories of the other lying beyond this line, and each party professed to regard the agreement as a 'full and satisfactory settlement of all the principal differences of opinion which have arisen between them in regard to the frontier'.³

But the Durand agreement was far more than this. It was as it were the concrete symbol of compromise, the manifestation of a policy which whatever its merits was not carried to its logical conclusion. The British in refusing to obey the law of political and strategic development by a physical occupation of the natural frontiers of India had to take the consequences of such refusal. They solved the major problem, but in such a way that they set up for themselves a minor problem which has defied solution ever since.

The Durand Line, though perhaps in the circumstances the best line possible, has few advantages and many defects. It is illogical from the point of view of ethnography, of strategy and of geography. It cuts across one of the main basins of the Indus watershed, it splits a nation in two, and it even divides tribes. It is surprising that Abdur Rahman accepted such a boundary ;

¹ *Life of Abdur Rahman by himself*. Vol. II, Ch. 6.

² *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII, No. XII (Afghanistan).

³ *Ibid.* Article 6.

it is possible that in spite of Durand's careful and lucid explanations he did not really take in all the implications of the line drawn on the map before him, but was too conceited to say so.¹ It is certain that in spite of his signature on the treaty he refused to agree to some of the details shown on the map which accompanied it, so that portions of the line are still undemarcated and their exact delimitation uncertain. Nor did Abdur Rahman and his successor, Habibullah, treat the non-interference clause with much more respect than the tribesmen of Waziristan treated the line itself. To the rulers of Afghanistan interference meant armed interference. They did not consider themselves debarred in any way from sending emissaries across the line to maintain Afghan influence throughout the tribal areas, or from inviting *jirgas* (deputations) of tribesmen from the Indian side of the line to come to Kabul, where they were treated as state guests and dismissed with handsome gratuities. It was an essential part of the Amir's policy to maintain Afghan influence among the independent tribes throughout the border, partly to defend himself from armed rebellion against the state, and partly as a prickly hedge of defence against possible British aggression.

On the British side the demarcation of the Durand Line stimulated a recrudescence of the forward policy as applied to the local sphere of the tribal areas. A forward movement with the intention of occupying the whole tribal area between the administered border and the Durand Line was of course out of the question both then and later on. Such a movement would have been very costly in lives and treasure and would almost certainly have led to war with Afghanistan and the disruption of the Afghan Government without advancing a step nearer to the solution of the tribal problem. There could in fact be no general forward movement on the frontier which did not endanger the stability of the Afghan Government and consequently threaten the whole framework of our Central Asian policy. At the same time the natural impulse of the civilized to overrun the uncivilized on their borders was as strong on the north-west frontier of India as it was elsewhere in the world, and the resulting conflict of interests manifested itself in the fluctuating policies of the ensuing years.

Throughout the nineties, and particularly during the Viceroyalty

¹ I have known Afghan officials, long after Abdur Rahman's time, find much difficulty in reading a map.

of Lord Elgin, there was a forward tendency along the frontier, a tendency to push outposts up the valleys, to Wana in Waziristan and up the Tochi Valley in an endeavour to get more in touch with the 'independent' tribes.

We conceive [wrote the Government of India in 1894] that by reason of the agreement made in November 1893 between the Amir of Kabul and Sir Mortimer Durand . . . we have assumed a measure of responsibility for the peace of the Afghan border which has not hitherto been ours, and which under present arrangements we have no adequate means of discharging. We understand that Her Majesty's Government concur in this view . . . that while we emphatically repudiate all intention of annexing tribal territory we desire to bring the tribes whom this settlement concerns further within our influence.¹

The proposals advocated involved no great interference in the tribal areas, but the tribesmen, ever sensitive to any threat to their cherished independence, reacted to them in the next few years in a swift flame of revolt which scorched the frontier from Waziristan to the Malakand Pass. Retribution followed and outposts were established in the valleys and political agents appointed in them to deal with the wild men of the hills.

Then came Lord Curzon to succeed to the Viceroyalty and the pendulum swung back. It is true that Curzon was not a believer in the possibility of maintaining a wholly static policy on the frontier.

It is of course inevitable [he wrote in June 1899] that in the passage of time the whole Waziri country up to the Durand Line will come more and more under our control. No policy in the world can resist or greatly retard that consummation. My desire is to bring it about by gradual degrees and above all without the constant aid and pressure of British troops.

To implement this statement of policy he proposed the 'withdrawal of British forces from advanced positions, employment of tribal forces in defence of tribal country, concentration of British forces in British territory behind them as a safeguard and a support, improvement of communications in the rear'.²

It is not clear how such a disposition of forces could increase

¹ Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 10 July 1894. *Parliamentary Papers*, 1898, Vol. 63, C. 8713.

² Budget speech, 30 March 1904.

our control of Waziristan even 'by gradual degrees', and I cannot help feeling some doubt whether Curzon ever really appreciated the fundamental issues of the whole frontier question. His policy certainly did not put an end to the punitive expeditions,¹ nor did it protect the settled districts from the trans-border raiders, the gangs of desperate men who would move stealthily down from the hills by night, lie up in some ravine by day, and then pounce on some frontier village, murder and rob and pillage, and maybe carry off a wretched Hindu merchant to hold to ransom beyond the border hills. The present writer, as a subaltern in a Frontier Cavalry regiment, has vivid recollections of the Curzon 'close border' policy as it appeared to those who had to carry it out in the years immediately preceding the First World War. Life in the little frontier cantonments was anything but secure in the days before barbed wire when the firebrand of the Mahsud tribe, the notorious Mullah Powindah, was sending down his fanatical emissaries from across the border to murder a white man if they could get one and so secure certain entry into Paradise. And always there were the raids, the sudden alarm, the long dust-choked ride through the stifling heat of a July night, clattering out on to the stony glacis of the frontier hills, and away forty miles before dawn only to find as often as not that the birds had flown, leaving a trail of death and destruction behind them. The Curzon policy advanced our relations with the trans-border tribes not one whit, and broke down altogether under the strain of the Third Afghan War when British control of the trans-frontier areas vanished in a few days at the approach of an Afghan force under General Nadir Khan, Commander-in-Chief of King Amanullah's Army (afterwards His Majesty King Nadir Shah).

Once more the pendulum swung over this insoluble problem. The 'close border' policy gave way to the 'modified forward' policy, and once again the British pushed forward into the tribal territory. I shall discuss in a later chapter² some of the effects of this last phase of the British attempt to deal with a situation which was as intolerable to endure as it was impossible to resolve.

¹ Known as Wilcox's Week-end Wars, after General Sir James Wilcox who waged them to the satisfaction of himself and of the Government of India.

² Pt. II, Ch. XIII.

Chapter XI

THE PRESENT GUARDIANS OF THE HINDU KUSH

(1919-1929)

(1)

IN the early hours of 20 February 1919 the Amir Habibullah was shot dead in his camp at Qala-i-gush in the Laghman district not far from Jalalabad, where he was enjoying a shooting holiday. The originators of the plot were never discovered, and the evidence against the man condemned for the deed itself was slender. Various reasons were given for the assassination. By some it was attributed to political motives; by others to a plot hatched within the ruling family itself for private reasons and connived at if not instigated by the Amir's third son Amanullah. But we, who are concerned rather with the sequence of political development in this country than with the details of particular incidents, must look beyond the sordid intricacies of a court intrigue for the true motives behind this incident.

The Amir Habibullah belonged to a tradition inherited from the previous century, the tradition of acquiescence by oriental peoples in the supremacy of those of European origin. The outstanding example of the assumption by the Europeans of this supremacy is to be found in the Convention of St. Petersburg of 1907. This Convention, as we have seen, settled vital questions connected with Tibet, arranged the future conduct of Afghan foreign affairs, and partitioned Persia into spheres of influence without any reference whatever to the wishes or the aspirations of the peoples chiefly concerned. I do not suggest, however, that the convention was on this account a bad convention. On the contrary, it served a supremely valuable purpose, not only in resolving British and Russian differences, but also in stabilizing and consolidating international boundaries through Central Asia

in such a way that they have since endured without injury all the stresses and strains of a most disturbed era.

But, so far at any rate as the British were concerned, this Convention postulated an attitude of mind, which as the century progressed was increasingly to irritate and to inflame the awakening nationalism of oriental peoples. The British are extremely efficient administrators and rulers, not only of their own but also of other people's countries. They exercise this talent from the highest motives and with the greatest zeal for the good of those they govern. But they are, or were, so certain that the benefits which they are conferring on the peoples they rule will be recognized as benefits not only by themselves but also by the beneficiaries, that they ignore the psychological factor inherent in their actions. There is nothing in this world so exasperating to the inefficient as the 'supreme consciousness of effortless superiority'¹ displayed by the efficient, and in proportion as the former develop and in due course become less inefficient, so do they seek with increasing vehemence to rid themselves of a yoke which in spite of its security carries with it the humiliating stigma of inferiority. Such has been the inevitable consequence of British rule over alien people.

To these primary impulses to revolt among oriental people must be added the events and tendencies of the opening years of the twentieth century. In Britain the lessons of the Boer War and the passing of the Victorian era gave rise to a more liberal and progressive attitude of mind among the rulers of a great Empire. In the east the rise of Japan and her success in the field against Russia had a profound effect on the attitude of oriental peoples towards their European conquerors and suzerains. In India the Minto-Morley reforms were the first step in the emancipation of the Indian peoples. Throughout the world the first decade of the twentieth century saw the stirring of new ideas on such matters as the domination of one people by another, and the vexed question of the rights of self-determination. The First World War of 1914-18 gave impulse and shape to these ideas while they were still half formed and hastened at perhaps too great a speed their translation into action.

But while it is against such a background as this that we should

¹ A phrase used, I believe, by Lord Asquith in eulogizing his fellow students of Balliol College, Oxford.

consider the reign of the Amir Habibullah, I would not suggest that the ideals of self-determination and free democracy penetrated at that time deeply into the minds of the Afghan people. Evolution towards a free society was bound to be slow in a country so remote and so cut off from contacts with its more progressive neighbours. But even in Afghanistan the current of world progress, and particularly of the rise of Japan, was not without its influence on the minds of the intelligentsia of the country.

Habibullah did not escape its influence, as we can see by his attitude towards the St. Petersburg Convention. But he was bound by a treaty, which he looked on as more or less personal, to the British Government, and he had been deeply influenced by his visit to India. Moreover, he had inherited that instinctive and statesmanlike understanding of the broad lines of policy which his country must follow if it were not to be ground to pieces between the upper and the nether millstones of his two mighty neighbours. And so in spite of the Turkish entry into the war, in spite of the plots and machinations of his brother, Nasrullah, and the war party in Kabul, and in spite of the influence of the German-Turkish Mission which managed to reach Kabul in 1915, the Amir honoured his pledged word and maintained neutrality throughout the course of hostilities.

In doing so he incurred great unpopularity, so great that to strengthen his position the British Government in 1915 increased his subsidy while the King sent him a letter of thanks for his staunchness. But these measures did nothing to stem the rising tide of nationalism, in fact they tended to increase it. In February 1919 the Amir's advisers induced him to demand from the Viceroy that the Peace Conference should recognize the freedom and independence of his Kingdom. But before any answer could come from India the Amir was dead.

The flood of popular sentiment which had swept Habibullah off his throne swept Amanullah on to it. Immediately after the Amir's death his brother Nasrullah, who had been with him in Jalalabad, proclaimed himself successor to the throne and was acknowledged as such by Habibullah's two elder sons. But the third son, Amanullah, was in Kabul in charge of the arsenal and in command of the garrison. His possession of the former gave him tactical superiority, and he outbid his uncle for the support of the latter. Moreover, while Nasrullah, a devout Muslim,

represented the religious and conservative elements in the country, Amanullah, young, ambitious, and popular, represented nationalism and progress. It was to him that the nation turned for a leader.

But the Afghans, like other young people, are liable to be volatile and fickle in their allegiance. A few weeks after his accession Amanullah antagonized the powerful religious faction by imprisoning his uncle for complicity in the murder of his father, and incurred the resentment of the army by releasing the distinguished Musahiban family, of whom we shall hear more later and who were believed to have had a hand in the affair. The situation deteriorated rapidly, and Amanullah, desperately seeking a means to reunite his people under him, found it in the time-honoured expedient of making war on a long-suffering and benevolent neighbour. In so doing he showed considerable astuteness. While on the one hand he was able to pose as the leader of his people in their march to freedom from British suzerainty, on the other he appealed to their religious fervour by proclaiming a holy war against the unbelievers and to their cupidity by holding out to them the fair prospect of loot which an invasion of India would furnish to his followers as it had done to their forefathers from the days of Mahmud of Ghazni. In this last particular he was of course deceived, but the position in India in the spring of 1919 was sufficiently disturbed to lend some colour to the reports reaching Kabul that the country was ripe for revolt and to encourage the Amir to launch his attack.

When a month later the Afghans were obliged to ask for an armistice the Amir ascribed the outbreak of hostilities to misunderstandings by officials on both sides of the border. This was not strictly true, since it was in fact due to the occupation by Afghan regular troops of positions on the Indian side of the border near Landi Kotal in the Khyber Pass. It would perhaps be more correct to say that the Afghans mistimed their venture. The Amir had intended it to coincide with a rebellion in India which was being fomented by his agents and principally by a certain Ghulam Haidar, Afghan postmaster in Peshawar. This was timed to open on 8 May in Peshawar city, where the agent had collected, with the help of the Indian Revolutionary Committee, a mob of some 7,000 bad characters with the intention of

burning the Cantonment and Civil Lines, damaging the railway, and destroying the mobilization stores. News of the intended outrage reached the ears of the British authorities on 7 May. The Chief Commissioner, Sir George Roos-Keppel, promptly shut the gates of the walled city and turned off the water supply. No city of the plains of India can last for more than a few hours in May without water, and the rebellion was nipped in the bud.

Thus Amanullah's attempt to emulate the great deeds of his ancestors missed fire. Fighting on the northern and southern sectors of the frontier went on in a somewhat half-hearted fashion for a month, during which time the Afghans uniformly got the worst of it. Only in the centre where an advance by General Nadir Khan (afterwards H.M. King Nadir Shah) seriously upset the tribal situation did the Afghans secure any success. At the same time a bomb dropped from an aeroplane on Kabul was a grave blow to Afghan morale, hitherto buoyed up by the belief that their capital, sheltering among its hills, was immune from air attack from a base in India.

But it was with some relief that the British Government, exhausted by four years of war, received and accepted Amanullah's request for an armistice. The frontier defence organization in Waziristan and Zhob had collapsed and would take time and money to repair. The British Government had no desire whatever to add to their commitments by continuing a fight which would in all probability lead to the disintegration of Afghanistan and the disappearance of the buffer between India and Russia. Once again and for very good reasons the British refused to accept the offer fate held out to them.

Instead they went to the other extreme. They handed back to an irresponsible, hot-headed young man, ruler of a people who had for generations looked on them with hatred, the keys to the defence of India which they had taken from his ancestors. It was once again a remarkable act of statesmanship, an act which could only find justification in the ultimate success of a long-term policy, and which if it failed would have been looked on as a most unjustified gamble in political strategy.

But the decision, communicated to the Afghan Delegation who came down to Rawalpindi in July, that Afghanistan should be 'officially free and independent in its internal and external

affairs',¹ was the outcome of a realistic appraisal of a changing world. However valuable the Convention of St. Petersburg may have been as an instrument designed to solidify a fluid situation, the remote control of the foreign relations of another country without the physical presence at any time of the controller or his agents could not continue for very long.

As far back as 1906 a newly appointed Secretary of State for India had commented on the peculiarities of the situation in forcible terms :

The extraordinary and unparalleled anomaly of the relations between Afghanistan and the British Government has often been described ; how we are bound to defend the Amir's country, yet are forbidden to take a single step for defence within its borders, or to send a single officer to reconnoitre the best means for its defence ; how we give the Amir an annual subsidy of eighteen and a half lakhs, yet are not allowed to place a European agent at his capital, and even our Asiatic agent is kept under strict surveillance ; how even our advice is resented ; how we give the Amir arms, and allow him to import arms, and yet must make the best of much unfriendly behaviour, and refrain from asserting even the *droits des limitrophes* ; how our ally, as a condition of governing his subjects, is unable to check their fanaticism. Evidently so singular a position is only tolerated or upheld for peculiarly strong reasons, arising from the belief in the minds of Afghan and British rulers equally that each of them requires and receives some valuable considerations from the other.²

These considerations though still of much value no longer could outweigh the urge for freedom. Already during the war the British Government had been unable to prevent direct dealings between the Amir and the Turkish-German Mission in 1915, and Afghan sentiment had, as we have noted, hardened on the question of the control of foreign relations to a very marked degree since then. It was no good blinking the fact that nothing short of annexation would induce the Afghans to renew their subordinate alliance with the British Government, and it is greatly to the credit of those charged with the conduct of India's foreign affairs that they realized and accepted the new order.

But it was not an easy decision to make. It involved a retro-

¹ See letter from the Chief British to the Chief Afghan Representative attached to the Rawalpindi Treaty of 8 August 1919. *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII, No. XXIII (Afghanistan).

² Mr. (afterwards Lord) Morley to the Government of India, 2 November 1906.

grade step, one of the first of those steps which have marked the ebb of British power and prestige from the high-water mark of the latter half of the nineteenth century. It placed once more the fate of India's north-western defences in the melting-pot, at a time too when the contents of the pot were not only melting but seething and bubbling with all the hell's brew of the immediate post-war era.

For during this period the situation in the Near and Middle East deteriorated from the British standpoint with remarkable rapidity.¹ The Greek attack on Turkey, who still in 1920 held in her hands the standard of the Khilafat,² was encouraged by the Allies and bitterly denounced throughout the Muslim world. The Khilafat movement in India gathered force and in June developed into 'Hijrat', whereby several thousand Indian Muslims emigrated into Afghanistan to the Amir's, and ultimately to their own, discomfiture. Seldom if ever can Great Britain's reputation for fair play and good faith have stood lower in Indian estimation than it did at this time.

Added to this the new Government of Soviet Russia, struggling for existence against White Russian forces supported by British munitions and advice, had entered into an uneasy alliance with the Turks, based rather on the bond of a common danger from the Allied Powers than on any natural sympathy of ideas, but animated with intense hostility to Great Britain. The Pan-Turanian movement which in a year or two was directly to threaten Soviet predominance in Turkestan and Azerbaijan had not as yet developed to any marked degree, and the Soviet Government with Turkish approval had sent by 1920 a mission to Kabul, seeking to find with the help of the Amir a line of attack on India.

The Anglo-Afghan Treaty of Rawalpindi of 1919 was designed not as a permanent agreement but merely to regulate the immediate relations between the two countries. It was followed, after a period of uneasy quiet, by a renewal of negotiations leading up to the dispatch in January 1921 of a British mission to Kabul under Sir Henry Dobbs, charged with the task of negotiating a treaty which would place future relations between Britain and Afghanistan on a permanent foundation.

¹ For a résumé of the general course of events during this period, see A. J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1920-23*, pp. 361-89.

² Turco-Afghan Treaty, 1 March 1924—Article III.

Dobbs found in Kabul a situation of extreme delicacy and difficulty. This remote capital of a hitherto unknown state had been of a sudden transformed into a diplomatic battleground where the two great Asiatic powers were competing for the Amir's friendship, where a Turkish military mission under Jemal Pasha ostensibly engaged in reorganizing the Afghan army was in fact making every effort to intrigue with the frontier tribes in a manner hostile to Britain, and where Indian revolutionaries, supported by the Bolsheviks, had established an advanced base. We need not enter into details of this protracted struggle, which lasted from January to November, during which time it seemed more than once that the whole fabric of Indian security built round the great barrier of the Hindu Kush must crash, leaving Afghanistan open to Bolshevik influence and penetration. Twice did the Afghans put forward an 'absolutely final' draft treaty the terms of which were wholly unacceptable to the British Government; twice did the long line of transport to convey the British Mission back to India file through the Khyber Pass only to be sent back to Peshawar as negotiations took a fresh and more hopeful turn. On one occasion the British official mail-bag went astray and negotiations were suspended for a fortnight till it was recovered; on another the frigid reception in London by Lord Curzon, then Foreign Secretary, of the Afghan Mission, which was touring Europe to establish contact with the comity of nations, so infuriated the Amir that he caused a letter of studied rudeness to be sent to the Chief British Delegate.¹ These and many other obstacles had to be surmounted while the Afghans weighed and counterweighed the advantages of a British or of a Russian alliance. In the end they accepted neither the one nor the other. A treaty with Russia, signed in February and ratified in August, was full of promises few of which were fulfilled.² A treaty with Britain which came into force on signature in November, promised nothing beyond the establishment of neighbourly relations.³ But this in fact was quite sufficient, and the very looseness of the relations which it recorded rendered less probable the

¹ This letter, which was afterwards withdrawn, was signed by Sardar Mahmud Tarzi, the Afghan Foreign Minister. It omitted all the usual courtesies and began 'Janab-i-Dobb'—the omission of the final *s* being perhaps the unkindest cut of all!

² *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII, App. VII (Afghanistan).

³ *Op. cit.*, Vol. XIII, No. XXIV (Afghanistan).

friction which would almost certainly have resulted from a closer association.

For as we review the course of the disturbed history of this period we see that what counted were the facts of the situation as they occurred, and not the promises and arguments and policies of statesmen. When the Afghan Treaty was signed at the end of 1921 the British position in the Near and Middle East had been seriously undermined, while in India political conditions were extremely disturbed and the economic situation unfavourable. In the course of the next two and a half years, such matters as the settlement of the Irish question, the treaty of peace with Turkey, and the disappearance of the Khilafat and Pan-Islamic movements brought about by Mustapha Kemal's abolition of the Caliphate, removed the main planks of anti-British propaganda in the East, while Britain herself, unshaken by the strains and stresses of the early post-war period in Asia, emerged stable, unmoved and strong amid the debris of lost causes, of abortive enterprises, and of ill-conceived intrigues which littered the Central Asian scene. In the end it was this stability, combined with Afghan determination to resist foreign infiltration, and the consequent fundamental identity of interests between the two Governments, which ensured that the Hindu Kush should continue its historic role as the outer bulwark of India's defences.

It was, however, very soon evident that the guardianship of the Hindu Kush had now passed into the hands of a man who was ill-qualified by character or temperament to play so important a role in the interests of Asiatic stability and world peace. His Majesty the Amir Amanullah Khan ¹ was a difficult and baffling personality. He possessed much of the charm and affability which is characteristic of the descendants of Painda Khan, founder of the ruling family of the Muhammadzais; he was abstemious in habit and exemplary in his domestic life; he was fond of tennis and riding and was a fair shot. He was a patriot, inspired with devotion to his country, hard-working and zealous to promote her interests and to establish the position of Afghanistan among the free nations of the world. For a man who had never been out of Afghanistan until he embarked on his world tour in

¹ He was first styled 'His Majesty' in a complimentary letter from King George V on the conclusion of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty. He assumed the title of 'Padishah' or 'King' in June 1926.

December 1927 he was well, if superficially, informed on world affairs. In what respect then did he fail?

A key to his character may perhaps be found in his curious stammering, staccato manner of speech and in his lack of chin, indicating an abrupt, impulsive, and at the same time a weak character. Weak that is to say in his inability to choose good advisers and in the influence in state affairs which he allowed to such evil counsellors as the notorious Charkhi family of Logar, while he banished or disregarded the notable Musahiban family; impulsive in that he was governed not by any reason or understanding of the requirements of his country, but by sudden decisions based on imperfect knowledge, which caused him to embark on projects often quite unsuitable or beyond the power of his servants to carry through. To these fatal weaknesses must be added an absurd conceit and arrogance of disposition, characteristic of a young and very ignorant people to whom the humiliations of the revolution of 1929 taught a chastening and salutary lesson.

But what a chance presented itself at the end of 1921 when Afghanistan was at length launched on the world as a full fledged sovereign state, guarded by the jealousies and suspicions no less than by the solemn treaties of her great neighbours! What a chance for a wise administrator who understood not only the temper of his people but also the basic elements of good government! Here was a country and a people wild, savage, and untamed, but a country and a people of great potentialities, the people virile, intelligent, and ready to learn, the country practically undeveloped but teeming with possibilities for the farmer, the mining expert, and the engineer. There was no internal or external debt, the cost of essential services was very small, the requirements of the people very simple. Here was a chance for some wise economic and cultural planning, to raise the standard of life by the development of the country's material resources, while at the same time raising the standard of thought by a careful scheme of educational development. There were immense obstacles to be faced, the bigotry of the powerful priesthood, the fierce and lawless disposition of the tribes, the intractable nature of the country itself. But these obstacles were there to be faced, the solution of the problem lay in appreciating and surmounting them.

But Amanullah did not face the problem ; it is indeed doubtful if he even grasped the fundamental issues of the task before him. The first essential was to maintain law and order, but in order to meet the cost of grandiose and unnecessary projects he enforced drastic reductions in the army and unpopular reforms in the system of recruitment. The loss of the British subsidy was for a time offset by assistance afforded by Soviet Russia, but expenditure was rising swiftly while no serious attempt was made to increase the revenue of the country by developing its resources. On the contrary money was spent in projects which were either entirely unproductive or could only indirectly affect the prosperity of the Afghan people. Expensive Legations were established in many capitals abroad with little regard whether they fulfilled any useful purpose or not, experts were imported from Europe and kept idle for months owing to the inability of their employers to allot them tasks. A costly endeavour was made and then abandoned to drive a new road to India through the great gorge of the Kabul River, while an attempt, admirable in conception, to connect northern and southern Afghanistan by a direct road across the Hindu Kush, reached the summit of the main ridge but got no further. Perhaps the most costly as well as the least necessary of all these projects, was the construction of a new capital on a grandiose scale at a site a few miles from Kabul, intended to emulate the great new cities which were then springing up at Delhi and Ankara. One cannot help sympathizing with the ideals which inspired these projects, but to attempt to realize them on a revenue of less than three million pounds a year, without at the same time endeavouring to augment the national income, was the act of a fool or a madman.

But more dangerous still were the reforms which Amanullah sought to introduce into the social life of the people. In the spring of 1923 he promulgated a new administrative code which, on the one hand, was generally believed to violate the canons of Islamic Law, and, on the other, dislocated an administration already weakened in its power to maintain order by reductions in the army. The climax came when early in 1924 he placed before his fanatical and conservative people an ill-considered measure for the education of women.

In the meantime Amanullah's adventures in the field of foreign affairs had been none too happy. He had at the outset of his

reign stood forward as a champion of Islam and a supporter of the rights of self-determination among Islamic peoples. His first preoccupations in this field were in the north, where in the spring of 1922 rebellion against the Bolsheviks inspired and led by Enver Pasha of the Turkish party of Union and Progress, was spreading through Bukhara and Farghana. The Amir, his head filled with dreams of a Central Asian Confederacy under his own leadership, concentrated his forces under some of his ablest commanders along the northern frontiers; and, without definitely committing himself, entered into correspondence with Enver Pasha and awaited results. The Soviet Government now took action, demanding a withdrawal of Afghan troops and a proclamation by the Amir of Afghan neutrality. The Amir gave way to the extent of publishing the required *démenti*. Shortly afterwards the death of Enver Pasha deprived the Pan-Turanian movement in general and the Bukharans in particular of the leadership necessary for the prosecution of such a struggle. In November 1922 Amanullah, who had gone north to consult his generals, abandoned the project and returned to Kabul. A year later the last vestiges of Bukharan independence had disappeared, and the ex-Amir settled down to a life of exile in a village not far from Kabul.

Amanullah now turned his attention to his south-eastern frontiers, where the British were at this time exploiting a fresh swing of the pendulum towards more positive methods of dealing with the tribes between the administered border and the Durand Line, 'the modified forward policy' as it came to be known.¹ To the British Government the assumption by the Amir of full sovereign powers, and the signature of the treaty of 1921, imposed certain obligations on the Afghan Government relating to the maintenance of the peace of the frontier and non-interference across the line, which were seen more clearly in Whitehall and Delhi than they were in Kabul, where a British forward movement into tribal territory was looked on with the same suspicion by Amanullah as it had been by Abdur Rahman. Early in 1923 the Amir went down to the frontier to study the position for himself. He held a *jirga* (assembly) of the tribal leaders in Jalalabad

¹ I propose to study post first-war developments of frontier policy in more detail in Ch. XIII. Only sufficient mention is made of them here to show the general trend of Afghan affairs at the time.

at which many disaffected chiefs from the Indian side of the frontier were present. Large sums of money were distributed and hints thrown out of possible further action. Tension increased all along the border, outrages against British subjects were committed, and when the culprits took refuge on the Afghan side of the line, redress was not forthcoming. Throughout the year the Afghans maintained an attitude of indifference and evasion to all British demands for more neighbourly conduct till in December preparations had to be made for the withdrawal of His Majesty's Legation and the severance of diplomatic relations.

When the Afghan Government at length realized that the British were not bluffing, they gave way. In March 1924 the immediate causes of complaint had been settled satisfactorily and the incident was closed. The first lesson in the responsibilities imposed on a sovereign state not by *force majeure* but by international law and custom had been learnt, but at a price. Amanullah's unwilling acceptance of the role of the first Afghan ruler to attempt to fulfil his obligations towards his British neighbours, seriously weakened his position with his subjects. The combination of this failure to support the tribes and his dire attempt to interfere with their social codes by introducing female education was more than they could stand. In the fanatical regions of southern Afghanistan, in Zamindawar, rebellion had already begun when, in the spring of 1924, rumours of trouble were heard in the mountainous regions of Khost to the south of Kabul.

(2)

The Khost rebellion, as it has been generally called from the area which furnished the main rebel forces, lasted from March 1924, when troops were first sent to deal with the outbreak, till January 1925, when the principal instigator of the tribes, the Lame Mullah, was executed in Kabul. In its course it involved the tribes of nearly all the southern province and at one time spread dangerously among the Ghilzais. In its early stages the weakness of the Afghan regular forces was repeatedly shown up by defeats at the hands of rebel bodies, until these had penetrated into the Logar Valley and reached a point only thirty-five miles

from the capital where at one time signs of panic were apparent.¹

At this point the Amir showed both courage and energy. He formally declared war on the rebels, sent out emissaries to raise the surrounding tribes, and hastily purchased two British aeroplanes which were flown against the rebels by German pilots. Throughout August the situation was critical, but the appearance of the aeroplanes turned the scale. Early in the rebellion a natural son of the ex-Amir Yaqub Khan escaped from surveillance in India, and provided a figurehead for the rebel cause. His presence also encouraged their forces in the belief that they had at least the sympathy of the British Government. It was not until the latter had shown by the sale of aeroplanes to the hard-pressed Amir their support for the forces of law and order that rebel courage began to fail.

But the outcome of the rebellion was a triumph for the conservative elements in the country. In July 1924 the Amir summoned the Loe Jirga, the Great Assembly, to consider what measures were necessary to remove the causes of discontent which had led up to the outbreak. The Assembly decided that certain provisions of the conscription laws should be amended so as to make them more palatable. But their principal recommendation related to the provisions for the emancipation of women. It appeared that of all the reforms introduced by their sovereign, the one which in Pathan estimation struck at the roots of his social order and must be resisted at all costs, was the clause of the constitutional code, which guaranteed certain rights and status to women and deprived the father and the husband of his power to dispose of his daughter and his wife in whatever manner he pleased. The clauses bearing on these subjects were cancelled forthwith and female education was restricted to girls under twelve years of age. The Amir's surrender to reactionary religious leaders and his unwilling return to greater and quite unpalatable orthodoxy were a very serious blow not only to his *amour propre* but also to his prestige.

The most serious effect of the rebellion was to weaken the whole fabric of the state and pave the way for the upheaval which four years later brought about the Amir's downfall. The most

¹ I remember a panic-stricken messenger rushing into the Legation to say that the rebel forces were approaching and that the Amir himself had gone out to dig trenches on the Sher Darwaza hill. In fact he had gone out to shoot duck!

striking immediate effect was complete financial exhaustion. Even in 1924 an offer was made to pay for the aeroplanes purchased from Britain in hides and skins, and by the end the rebellion had cost five million pounds or nearly twice the annual revenue of the state. It was a moment which called for the most drastic economy and for a complete reorganization of the military forces whose prestige, as a result of their recent experiences, had sunk to its lowest ebb.

But while the Amir himself was a patriot, genuinely anxious to pull the country together after the disasters of 1924, and an intelligent and tireless worker, he had not got those qualities of leadership essential in such a crisis. Round his court were collected advisers of most indifferent quality, and he himself was too impetuous in his decisions and revolutionary in his outlook to supply the balance and sobriety of judgement which they lacked. The result was that, while improvement was spasmodic and transient, general deterioration was steady and constant. While the essential services were being starved, large sums were expended on the purchase of aeroplanes which would not fly, of furnishings for the great new capital, and of industrial implements and equipment which, in the absence of suitable arrangements for housing and repair, were rapidly rendered unserviceable until Afghanistan became a mausoleum of derelict machinery and abandoned factories. Speculation among even the highest officials was increasing, while the administration was daily becoming more corrupt and inefficient, and education was still being conducted in a most haphazard fashion.

As for the army, Amanullah's treatment of this most vital service was typical of his total lack of either method or continuity of purpose. There were many projects for reform. Jemal Pasha and his mission were allowed to begin work, and rendered themselves most unpopular in consequence. His scheme was abandoned shortly after he left Kabul and his successor was allowed no freedom of action. German officers attached to the Afghan staff merely translated text-books; a French military mission and Italian projects appear to have existed only on paper. It was not in fact till early in 1927 that with the arrival of a fresh Turkish mission the problem of training was tackled in earnest. But the effort came too late.

Such was the position in Afghanistan when, acting on one of

his sudden impulses, Amanullah accepted an invitation extended to him by the Italian Government, and in December 1927 set forth with his consort on a tour of Europe.

The royal tour lasted from early in December 1927, when the King, as he was now styled, crossed the Indian frontier at Chaman, till the end of July 1928, when he re-entered Afghanistan from Persia. In the course of these seven months the King with his consort and suite visited all the major capitals of Europe as well as the Muslim states of Egypt, Turkey, and Persia. The opening stages of his journey through India were marked by some incidents which suggested that the Afghan party, wholly ignorant of European customs, might prove awkward guests.¹ But the King was quick to learn and after their preliminary suspicions had been allayed, the visitors found it unnecessary to question or fail to conform with the arrangements made for their comfort and entertainment.

Contemporary records of the tour suggest that it was looked on as an original and interesting method of introducing Afghanistan and the Afghan people to the world through the personality of their King. And it must be admitted that so far as outward appearances went Amanullah himself played his part with that mixture of dignity and affability which was his most striking characteristic. But in fact it was but a further chapter in a rake's progress. Beneath a façade of urbanity and of kingly charm, the evil influences of his most ill-chosen advisers, impinging upon his own immoderate disposition, were hastening the growth of those revolutionary ideas which a few months later were to prove his undoing. A minor though striking illustration of this tendency was afforded by the King's attitude towards European dress. Before he left Kabul Amanullah ordered uniforms of a somewhat bizarre description from India for himself and his suite in order to conform with European customs, but gave out that he would destroy them all on his return. In India his suite appeared in

¹ The author, who attended the royal party in their journey through India as one of the 'Mehmandars' or official hosts, has recollections of some of these incidents, and particularly the scene at Bombay when the King refused to dine unless the seating arrangements were altered so as to conform with Afghan custom. A state banquet without the principal guest would have been an unfortunate opening to the tour. However, the tact and patience of Sir Leslie Wilson, Governor of Bombay, who in the Viceroy's absence through illness was the King's host, achieved a happy if rather ludicrous compromise and smoothed the way for future relations.

their new uniforms while the King himself remained faithful to a top hat and frock coat of antiquated pattern and indifferent cut which had obviously been made in Kabul. By the time he reached Cairo, however, he had discarded his home-made outfit for something more modern and actually attended the Azhar mosque in a grey top hat of fashionable shape in which to the scandal of the *ulama* he performed the ritual genuflections of Muslim prayers.

As with lesser matters of dress so with more important affairs of state. He saw unfolded before him all the wealth, the luxury, and the freedom of the great civilized states of the western world. Although during his tour he never betrayed his feelings, his mind could hardly escape being bemused and dazzled by all he witnessed of the magnificence of the capitals of Europe, of the wealth of their countries, of their great armaments and of their achievements in every branch of art and science. It would have required a much more stable character than Amanullah's not to have been fired by what he saw in the west with a spirit of emulation, which burst all bounds when he learnt at the end of his voyage what his Muslim friends and neighbours had accomplished in Turkey and Persia.

The actual tour appears to have gone off as well as could be expected. Amanullah gave on the whole a favourable impression in Egypt, where he was looked on as a champion of the Orient in its struggle with the West. In Italy he was received by the King, who unwisely presented him with the Collar of the Annunziata. This decoration entitled its possessor to the style of 'cousin' of the King of Italy, a fact which was to cause some embarrassment in Italian-Afghan relations at a later date. The industrial towns of northern Italy took considerable trouble to show him their wares in the hope that the Afghans would place large orders in the first European factories they visited. They found, however, that the scale of bribery expected by His Majesty's entourage was a strong deterrent to successful negotiations.

From Italy the party proceeded to Nice, where the King received General Nadir Khan and his brothers of the Musahiban family, without however affecting a reconciliation with them, and then went on to Paris where their visit excited little interest. Thence they visited Belgium, Switzerland, and Germany, where German official circles were at pains to welcome visitors from whom they expected to receive extensive commercial orders.

In the middle of March the party crossed to England, where they were received as guests at Buckingham Palace, and later as state guests in Claridge's Hotel. The Afghan King and Queen were met at Dover by the Prince of Wales and at Victoria Station by Their Majesties. There was a State Banquet and other official functions, including a lunch at the Guildhall, military and naval displays, visits to industrial centres, and to such great sporting events as the Boat Race and the Grand National at Aintree.

The visit terminated early in April, when the King and his consort after a stay in England of three weeks left for the Continent. It appears to have been an unqualified success. The dignity and graciousness of his reception, the comfort and luxury in which he lived and in which he was moved from place to place, the smooth efficiency of all arrangements, and the genuine cordiality with which he was received by all classes appear to have had much effect on the impressionable King. The value of the personal touch in dealings with the rulers of Afghanistan has already been noted. In the present case it was marked and might have endured, had fortune so willed it, long enough to usher in a happier era in the relations between the two countries.

From London King Amanullah moved by easy stages across Europe to Warsaw, where he stayed for three days before moving on to Moscow. He spent about a fortnight in Russia, where he appears to have been well received by the Soviet Government, who spared no pains to treat him in a manner they thought would please him. No political discussions of any importance took place but the King managed to obtain a certain quantity of munitions, including thirteen aeroplanes, from his hosts during the course of his stay.

He was now on his homeward path. In the middle of May he journeyed south from Leningrad to Sevastopol and thence under Turkish escort to the Bosphorus and Ankara, where he was met by the President of the Republic, Kemal Ataturk. The stay of the royal party on Turkish soil was limited to a fortnight, and as during this short visit a fresh treaty of friendship and economic collaboration was negotiated and signed, in addition to the usual quota of official engagements, it would not seem that much time was left for Amanullah to learn from his host the

correct method of westernizing his people. But there is no doubt that these two final visits to Turkey and Persia sealed Amanullah's fate. He had left his homeland filled with a latent urge for revolutionary reforms and progress. In Europe he saw spread out before him the high standards of the civilization and the culture for which he longed. On his return through Asia he had for a brief space an opportunity to study the methods of two great rulers, each of whom appeared to have set his people on the path of progress, which Amanullah was determined to follow without in any way understanding either their methods or the mentality of the people they governed. In Tehran the Afghan party did not impress the Shah and the Court, who considered that their treatment in the European capitals had gone to their heads. They talked altogether too big and imagined that a few weeks in Europe could turn an Afghan into a civilized being. The King, however, seems to have won the hearts of the Persian people by his affability and graciousness, which contrasted so strongly with the sullen bearing and arrogance of their own rulers. Their applause and acclamations were still ringing in his ears as he set forth on the last stage of his journey across the Afghan border to Herat, and may well have fortified him in his determination to win similar acclaim from his dour and suspicious subjects who awaited his return.

During the King's absence affairs in Afghanistan proceeded smoothly. The Regent, Sardar Muhammad Wali Khan, proved himself a discreet and tactful ruler; a severe and late winter lessened the possibilities of tribal restlessness during the spring, and by the time the snow had melted from the passes everyone's attention was diverted to the news of the King's progress which was filtering through from Europe. At first this news was received with much gratification as the Afghan people became aware of the high dignity with which their King had been received in the capitals of Europe. Gradually, however, this attitude changed to one of criticism, as it became known how swiftly the royal couple had adopted European manners and customs. By the beginning of May these criticisms were becoming outspoken, particularly in religious centres such as Qandahar, where the news that the Queen was appearing unveiled and in European evening dress caused much resentment. Early in June the country was reported to be unusually quiet, but there was an

undercurrent of uneasy expectancy.¹ In spite of laudatory articles in the local press, the European tour had done nothing to increase the King's popularity. The treasury was completely empty, with the result that trade, which made use of the facilities afforded by the provincial treasuries for the transfer of credit, was at a standstill. This unfortunate situation was put down, rightly or wrongly, to the expenses incurred by the King in connexion with his tour, and the country awaited his account of the benefits accruing to it which would counterbalance the present parlous condition of its finances.

Criticism was momentarily silenced as the King crossed the border, and after passing through Herat he was received with enthusiasm by the people of Qandahar. Here, in reply to an address, His Majesty gave his listeners a foretaste of what was in store for them. He stated that the object of his tour had been to learn from the Western nations the real meaning of progress. He would shortly inform his people what conclusions he had reached. They included such questions as the status of women, the improvement of communications, and the advancement of education. He repeated these remarks at Kabul where he arrived on 1 July, and where he spent a few days in official ceremonies before proceeding for a brief rest to his summer headquarters at Paghman.

The concrete results of the King's tour were considerable. He had spent a sum of money which was estimated at anything up to one million sterling, mainly on munitions, though a large amount was spent in Germany on fittings and furniture for the new palace and official buildings at Dar-ul-Aman. He had in addition received a certain quantity of armaments as gifts from the different countries through which he passed. He had impressed the fact of Afghanistan's existence as a sovereign state on as many countries as possible by concluding formal treaties with any Government which was willing and had not already done so. In consequence Japan, Egypt, Finland, Latvia, Liberia, Switzerland, and Poland were added to the list begun by the Afghan Mission sent out in 1920. In addition the King concluded a treaty with Turkey of friendship and collaboration, which was intended to elaborate and confirm previous relations, and in

¹ The author, who was in Kabul in June 1928, well remembers this 'calm before the storm', so unnatural and so ominous in this normally restless country.

Persia signed two protocols with similar intent. To these concrete results was added the vision of a reformed and westernized Afghanistan which the King now proposed to impart to his subjects.

The annual festival to celebrate the independence of Afghanistan takes place in August, at about the same date as that of the signature of the treaty of Rawalpindi which it commemorates. King Amanullah decided to choose this occasion to inform his people of the impressions gained by his tour, and of his programme of reforms intended to bring Afghanistan into line with the nations of the West. For this purpose he summoned the Loe Jirga (Great Assembly) of representatives from all parts of the country to meet in Kabul on 16 August. Meanwhile he remained in Paghman preparing his brief, while the Regent continued to conduct the affairs of State. The first signs of the new order were, however, already apparent. The most absurd regulations were being issued and enforced by the police. No woman could appear in Paghman unless she was wearing a special pattern of light veil, a man was arrested for wearing his hair long at the sides, hats of European pattern were to be worn, loose pantaloons were to be discarded in favour of trousers. Exaggerated reports of these innovations spread through the districts and representatives of the Loe Jirga assembled with reluctance. The programme of the festival looked strange to anyone with knowledge of the temperament of the Afghan people, and of the customs of former years. A *bal masque*, theatrical and cinema performances were included among the items, and passed off very successfully, a variety entertainment which included a scantily clad lady contortionist being particularly well patronized.

The Loe Jirga met on 28 August at the end of the festival. The members, about 1,000 in number, were an unhappy and pathetic sight. Clad in black morning coats and trousers, with white shirts, black ties, and soft hats, they looked very much more like caricatures of Nonconformist clergy than Ghilzai, Mangal, and other tribesmen. They heard from their King an account of his European tour, followed by an outline of his proposed reforms. These included the formation of a National Assembly of 150 elected representatives to rule the country under a constitutional monarchy. The proposals for reform aimed at the complete emancipation of women, the introduction

of monogamy, compulsory education for both sexes, the divorce of Church from State, and financial and currency matters. Other business of minor importance was discussed during the five days on which the Loe Jirga sat, before separating to spread the news of their King's insane proposals throughout the countryside. Meanwhile two of the most important religious leaders of Afghanistan, the Hazrat Sahib of Shor Bazar and his nephew, were arrested while collecting signatures on a petition to protest against the King's intention to westernize Afghanistan and his methods of doing so, as being contrary to the tenets of Islam. Further arrests followed as the King realized that there was a widespread conspiracy afoot among the religious leaders to thwart his intentions to undermine their position.

By the end of September dissatisfaction and unrest was increasing throughout the country. The army, by means of which alone could the King hope to coerce his reluctant people into accepting so drastic a change in their accepted habits and customs, was miserably paid and inadequately housed. Its discipline and efficiency were deplorably neglected and its loyalty to the King's person more than doubtful. The King's unpopularity was increasing and few persons outside the Court circle were disposed to support either him or his reforms. Trouble broke out in the Koh-i-Daman area north of Kabul under the leadership of a well-known brigand, Habibullah Khan, alias Bachha-i-Saqao or son of the water-carrier, but subsided shortly afterwards when the outlaw gangs dispersed to the hills.

Meanwhile the King continued to advocate his proposals for reform. In the month of October he delivered to a representative gathering of Afghans in Kabul a series of lectures covering in detail the various measures he proposed to adopt. He boldly pronounced himself to be a revolutionary, and asked his countrymen to follow him in a programme which, if carried into effect, would have entirely altered every aspect of Afghan social and official life. His audience listened and acclaimed his proposals, except for one dissentient voice whose owner was promptly relieved of his appointment. Even the action of the Queen in dramatically tearing off her veil was greeted with applause.

It was the last acclamation the King was to receive. Although the approach of winter was unfavourable to rebellion and there was no outstanding figure in the country to lead a revolt against

constituted authority, resentment against the King was so widespread that an outbreak might be expected from any quarter. On 14 November the Shinwaris of the Eastern Province broke out and by the end of the month had invested Jalalabad and destroyed the King's palace and the British Consulate. Disaffection then spread to the Mohmands and to the other tribes of the Eastern Province, which was soon completely out of Government control. The Khost area was the next to go. Zadrans and Jajis turned against the Government and seized outposts on the Peiwar Kotal and elsewhere. Meanwhile in Kabul the King appeared unwilling to take the only action which held out any hope of restoring the position. It appears that both Soviet and Turkish Ambassadors urged him to fight to the bitter end, and after defeating the rebels to impose his new reforms. The British representative saw that such a course would be fatal. The regular troops even if willing were in no state to face the tribesmen. The air force was not of sufficient size to affect the situation, and bombing of Afghans by Russian pilots would only stiffen resistance and throw additional odium on the King. On 24 November Sir Francis Humphrys had an audience of the King at which he spoke strongly of the danger now besetting the régime. He told His Majesty frankly that he had alienated all classes of the population. Priests, agriculturists, merchants, and soldiers were all seething with discontent at the new reforms and at increased taxation. The King should direct every effort towards conciliating the Shinwari leaders and localizing the rising. If the Mohmands joined the rebellion the capital would be in great danger.

This warning appears to have had some effect. The Foreign Minister, Ghulam Sadiq, was sent down to Jalalabad to parley with the rebels and to arrange a settlement. He returned early in December with the rebel terms, which included complete cancellation of the reforms, abolition of the 'hasht nafari' system of conscription, the recall of Afghan girls sent to Europe for education, and an amnesty for all concerned in the rebellion. While these terms were under discussion further fighting broke out, and tribal reinforcements sent from Kabul were defeated and dispersed. It would appear that up to the middle of December the King did not take the rebellion seriously. The Eastern Province is a long way from Kabul and the rebel advance

had not got within seventy-five miles of the capital. In Khost no rebel move in the direction of Kabul had taken place. The rest of the country appeared quiet though uneasy. But Afghan forces had been dissipated, the seizure of Jalalabad by the rebels had shaken the Central Government, and in the capital there was no genuine loyalty towards the King.

It was in such circumstances that Habibullah Khan, the Bachha-i-Saqao, made his dramatic entry on the scene. He was a Tajik of Kala Khan, a village situated in the Koh-i-Daman Valley, some twenty miles north of Kabul, from which it is separated by a low range of hills. He had had a varied career. Having deserted from the Afghan army after eighteen months' service and having spent a period in Peshawar as a tea-seller, he had received sentence of eleven months' imprisonment in Parachinar in the Kurram Valley for housebreaking. He joined the rebels during the Khost rebellion of 1924, after which he became a highwayman. As leader of a gang of outlaws in the Koh-i-Daman Valley he had given considerable trouble to the Afghan authorities by raiding and robbing officials and wealthy travellers while showing much generosity to the poor. He was at large in the hill country north of Kabul at the beginning of the rebellion, and showed considerable astuteness by delaying his attack on the city until the Afghan Government were in difficulties over the Shinwari revolt and the defection of the army.

He seized the fort of Jabal-us-Siraj at the mouth of the Salang Valley on 10 December, when the garrison of 900 strong surrendered to him with their arms and equipment. On the 14th he advanced on Kabul down the north road past the British Legation, where the Minister closed the gates and warned him against an attack on the foreign Legations in and round Kabul. Between the Legation and the city the rebel forces captured the Koh-i-Lula forts with their stocks of arms and ammunition, and established themselves on the Asmai heights overlooking Kabul. For the next few days fierce fighting took place round the British Legation, which was completely cut off from the city and from communication with the outer world. Attempts were made by the royal troops to force an entry into the Legation precincts, which were throughout under heavy fire from the opposing forces, and British aeroplanes sent up to reconnoitre were also fired on. Sixty-two shells and thousands of bullets fell into the Legation

grounds, all buildings were hit and the Military Attaché's house was burnt to the ground. In the early morning of 23 December the Legation ladies and children were conveyed under cover of darkness and by devious paths to the aerodrome, whence they were taken by air to Peshawar, further evacuations of European women and children being made on the following days. By 25 December the King's troops had got the upper hand and the rebels fell back on Jabal-us-Siraj, where they put out of action the hydro-electric station which supplied Kabul with electric light and power.

Reinforcements now began to reach Kabul, and on 3 January 1929 the Regent issued from the capital and joined battle with the rebels in the Koh-i-Daman Valley. He was heavily defeated and the rebels once more approached the outskirts of Kabul. On 5 January the King issued a proclamation cancelling all the more controversial of his recent reforms and granting concessions to the mullas. The gesture came too late. Fighting continued till the 13th, when the Commander of the Royal Forces was surrounded and surrendered in a village a few miles north of Kabul, and by the evening of the 14th the Bachha-i-Saqao was in possession of all points of vantage. He had taken the aerodrome and was moving into the city.

On the 14th King Amanullah, in the hope of living to fight another day, thrust the crown into the unwilling hands of his elder brother, Inayatullah, and escaped out of the capital, making his way by road to Qandahar. Inayatullah lasted only three days. On the 17th the rebel troops were closing round the Arg (citadel) which contained the palace, the treasury, and the arsenal. A prolonged defence was out of the question and a massacre inevitable, when the chief priest of Kabul, the Hazrat Sahib of Shor Bazar, took the unprecedented step of asking the British Minister for help to save the royal party and the city from destruction. Sir Francis Humphrys took the responsibility, a very considerable one, of asking for aeroplanes to be sent from Peshawar on the guarantee of the Hazrat Sahib that they would not be fired on when they landed. This 'cease-fire' order was faithfully observed and for the second time inside a week a King abdicated and fled from Kabul. The water-carrier's son was left in possession of the Durrani throne.

In the course of this story we have seen the mountains of the

Hindu Kush in the possession of many divers races and controlled by all sorts and conditions of rulers. Greeks, Huns, Kushans, Hindus, Turks, all at one time or another have held dominion over the Hindu Kush, and the long line of Chieftains, Kings, and Emperors who have ruled here has included some of the most famous names in history. To this goodly assemblage was now to be added a strange and almost comic figure, the water-carrier's brat, the Bachha-i-Saqao as he is usually known, or Habibullah Ghazi, as he styled himself after his capture of Kabul. Not even a Pathan, he was a Tajik of the Koh-i-Daman Valley, a descendant of the old Iranian stock who 2,200 years before had ruled this country, but who since the coming of the Greeks had only once asserted themselves over their foreign masters.¹ It was a strange fate which threw up this jovial brigand to control for a few brief months the destinies of the Pathan nation and the fate of the Indian frontiers. Not that he can be said to have had very much control; had he been a Pathan he might have founded some new dynasty, though any dynasty save the Durrani would have been hard put to it to establish themselves. But a Tajik could never have controlled the Pathans for long. The great tribe of the Ghilzais supported him for a time, mainly because of their anger against Amanullah for his treatment of the Hazrat Sahib, but once Amanullah was out of the way the Ghilzais owed allegiance to no man.

Amanullah did not make much further resistance. Shortly after his arrival in Qandahar he revoked his abdication and prepared for an advance on Kabul as soon as the snow was off the passes. But it was a half-hearted business. The Qandaharis had little stomach for a fight. They got as far as Ghazni by the middle of April 1929, but were there attacked by the garrison and, harassed on the flank by a body of Suleiman Khel Ghilzais, they fell back to Kalat-i-Ghilzai. Here in May the Bachha's forces from Kabul renewed the attack. Amanullah's courage failed while the issue was still uncertain. He left the field of battle and returned to Qandahar, where he picked up his wife and family. On 23 May the party crossed the border at Chaman and a month later embarked at Bombay for Italy, where Amanullah sought refuge with his 'cousin', King Victor Emmanuel.

¹ Tajiks: see Pt. II, Ch. I. The Ghorid dynasty of the twelfth century A.D. was probably of the old Iranian stock.

The disappearance of Amanullah put an end to further organized support of his cause in northern, central, and western Afghanistan. Shortly before his final defeat his ambassador in Moscow, Ghulam Nabi of the notorious Charkhi family, crossed the Oxus at the head of a small force, almost certainly equipped and reinforced by the Soviet Government. But the north was bitterly hostile to Amanullah, and the Soviet Government were not prepared to back their fancy very far. In consequence Ghulam Nabi could get no further than Mazar-i-Sharif. Meanwhile a Tajik adherent of the Bachha, Abdur Rahim, moved north and captured Herat, where he set up a form of republican government, owing little or no allegiance to the brigand ruler of Kabul. Ghulam Nabi lingered on for a few more weeks but gave up hope and retired across the Oxus on hearing of Amanullah's final discomfiture.

The sole remaining opposition to the new régime now came from the southern province, where Sardar Nadir Khan and his brothers were continuing the struggle. But before going on to describe the dawn of a new era in Afghanistan, let us consider for a few moments the position as it was in the early summer of 1929.

The brigand was in control in Kabul, where his savage lieutenants were conducting something resembling a reign of terror. His authority extended over his own people in the Koh-i-Daman Valley and, so long as his money lasted, he could always find recruits from the neighbouring Pathan tribes to flock to his standards. The north and particularly the Herat province, as we have seen, was virtually independent, while the Pathan tribes of the south and east, though they might be prepared to fight for, would in no circumstances consent to be ruled by, the son of a Tajik menial. They had tasted freedom and had every intention of keeping it as long as possible. The country was leaderless and masterless; if left to itself it might very well fall to pieces in the next few months and break up into its component parts. The situation from the international point of view was full of danger.

The position, however, was obscure. Russian relations with Afghanistan had experienced some vicissitudes in the last few years. From 1924 onwards the Soviet Government appeared to be taking an increased interest in Afghan affairs. Rather more readiness to fulfil the provisions of the Soviet-Afghan treaty, the

proposed establishment of a state bank and a branch of the Vneshtorg (State Trading Company), and the offer of the services of Russian nationals in increased numbers all pointed to a more active policy of penetration than heretofore. Perhaps the most striking branch of their activities was the employment of about thirty Soviet citizens in the Afghan air force, and the facilities afforded for training Afghan pilots in Tashkent.

These friendly caresses by the Russian Bear owed a good deal to the personality of the Ambassador, M. Leonide Stark, who rather resembled a bear himself. They were temporarily interrupted by a quarrel over the ownership of the island of Urta-tagai (or Yangi Qal'a as it is also called) in the Oxus which brought into prominence the fact, which we have already noted,¹ that no decision had been reached, when the Oxus boundary was agreed on in 1873, whether the line should be the *thalweg* of the river or one or other of the banks. For a few weeks tension between the two countries was acute, but the Russians made skilful use of the incident to further their policy. As soon as they discovered the facts they withdrew their troops and agreed to the appointment of a joint commission of inquiry which gave the island into the complete ownership of Afghanistan. This graceful withdrawal from an unimportant position by the Soviet Government was looked on as a triumph for Afghan diplomacy. It was followed in 1926 by the signature of a pact of neutrality and non-aggression between the two Governments,² and in 1927 by an agreement for an air service between Kabul and Tashkent,³ while at the same time negotiations for a trade pact were taking place.

All this was happening at the same time as relations between the British and Afghan Governments were showing signs of strain, due to the unending aggravations of tribal affairs.⁴ In 1926 the Afghans went so far as to protest formally in London against the 'forward policy', in an endeavour to show that deliberate efforts were being made by the Government of India to thwart the efforts of the Afghan Government to transform neighbourly relations into sincere and friendly ones.

The general outcome of these manœuvrings was that at the time of Amanullah's downfall the Russian star was in the ascendant

¹ Pt. II, Ch. IX (2), p. 170.

² *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII, Appendix XI.

³ *Ibid.*, Appendix XII.

⁴ See Ch. XIII for details of the situation.

in Kabul. It was generally supposed that the Soviet Government, who at this time made no secret of the fact that the main objective of their eastern policy was to overthrow British rule in the East, were preparing the ground in Afghanistan to use it as a base in some form or other for an eventual advance towards India.

When, therefore, in the spring of 1929 the disappearance of Amanullah caused the buffer state to be transformed into a dangerous political vacuum, the question of what attitude the British Government should adopt to the existing situation was one of utmost delicacy and perplexity. Warned by the painful experience of the past century against intervention in Afghan internal affairs, they had refused Amanullah's requests for help, and ignored the hints thrown out by the Bachha that he should be accorded official recognition as the ruler of the Afghan State.

All eyes were now turned to Nadir Khan and his brothers who had crossed the Afghan border from India on 8 March 1929. He was so clearly the one man who could restore the situation and save the country from chaos and disruption that, although he had in the past shown himself strongly hostile to British frontier policy, it seemed inevitable that the British would give him every assistance in his efforts to regain the Afghan throne for the Durrani dynasty. But the British did nothing of the sort. At the outset of the rebellion the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs stated in the House of Commons that :

His Majesty's Government earnestly desire the establishment of a strong Central Government in Afghanistan and they will be prepared when this Government is established to show their friendship for the Afghan people by giving it such assistance as they can in the reconstruction and development of the country.¹

In pursuance of this policy the Government of India received Nadir Khan on his arrival in Bombay with courtesy, but caused him to be informed frankly but with all friendliness that their policy of non-intervention in Afghan affairs, the circumstances of the time, and to some extent Nadir Khan's own interests, unfortunately precluded the facilities and courtesies which the Government of India would otherwise have been pleased to show to so distinguished a visitor. They trusted that he would appreciate the motives underlying their desire that he should

¹ *Hansard*, 5th series, Vol. 224, p. 916.

refrain from any sort of political activity while in India and proceed as expeditiously as possible to Afghanistan. The British were in fact prepared to offer Nadir Khan neither help nor advice ; they were desperately anxious to fill the vacuum as speedily as possible, it seemed to them practically certain that no one now in the field save Nadir Khan could do this, and they were fully prepared to help him if he succeeded, but until he did so they would not lift a finger to further the cause they had so greatly at heart. Furthermore they made up a set of rules to govern the situation. It was unneutral to refuse an Afghan entry into Afghanistan, but once he was in he became a contestant, and it would be unneutral to allow him to recross the border, seeking a brief asylum before he plunged once more into the fray. And so in a mixture of the rules of cricket and football it was ordained that a player might go on the field once, and play for the crown. But if he was forced into touch, and recrossed the line whether voluntarily or not, he was ' out ', and the referees would not let him back into the game.¹

It was hardly to be imagined that such a policy, to all outward appearance quixotic, embarrassing, and unnatural, should obtain credence abroad. It was in fact widely held both at the time and for many years afterwards, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, that the fall of Amanullah had been deliberately brought about by the British Government and that Nadir Khan was their nominee to replace him. But this was not the case. The policy adopted at this time proves it, and its success justified the hazards of its adoption. The British declaration of neutrality and the fact that they made no move to interfere with the contesting parties were sufficient to impel the Russians to follow a similar course. And so for nine months, till in October 1929 Nadir Khan entered Kabul, the outer defences of India lay open, while conditions inside the country of the Hindu Kush invited encroachment from north and south. But from neither side was any movement made.

With a fair field and no favour Nadir Khan and his brothers crossed the frontier in March 1929. For the next few months he made little or no headway. The tribes of the Khost area,

¹ This happened to Sardar Hashim Khan, Nadir's brother, and afterwards Prime Minister. He had to sit on the touch-line at Quetta for nearly a month, after recrossing the line, until in October the game was finished and won, and he could rejoin the team.

most unstable of all Afghan peoples, had no intention of forfeiting their newly won freedom by helping a Durrani to recover the throne from a Tajik, and it is said that Nadir had to take oath that he was not fighting for Amanullah's cause before he could raise even a moderate force. He had managed to borrow a few hundred pounds from well-wishers in Peshawar, but he lacked arms and munitions, whereas his opponent had the Kabul treasury and arsenal to draw on. Three times he attempted to advance into the Logar Valley, and three times he was driven back, losing the provincial capital Gardez. Finally in August Nadir Khan asked the Government of India to allow him to recruit Wazir tribesmen from the Indian side of the line for a last desperate effort to reach Kabul. The request was peremptorily refused, but the time had passed for Nadir to pay much heed to such niceties of international procedure. In despair he put forward the pretence of withdrawing from the whole enterprise, and asked the Government of India to intervene in Kabul to secure the safety of his family. Such a request was willingly acceded to by a Government fully ready to accord to the individual the help they could not give to his cause. While they were pursuing their humane purpose, Nadir Khan was busy recruiting Wazirs and Mahsuds from across the line in defiance of their injunction. In the middle of September his army entered the Logar Valley and by 10 October Nadir's brother, Sardar Shah Wali Khan, after defeating the enemy forces at Charasiah, entered Kabul and was preparing to bombard the Arg (citadel) which was the brigand's last refuge, but which also contained his own and his brother's families.¹ Fortunately he did not have to carry out his purpose. At the last minute the Bachha's nerve failed him and he fled. The Arg surrendered to Shah Wali Khan and two days later Nadir Khan entered Kabul. On 16 October he was proclaimed King of Afghanistan under the title of His Majesty King Nadir Shah.

¹ H.R.H. Sardar Shah Wali once told me how when his preparations were just about ready he received a note smuggled out of the Arg from his family telling him to go ahead, and not to heed their safety.

Chapter XII

THE PRESENT GUARDIANS OF THE HINDU KUSH

(1929-1948)

(1)

HIS MAJESTY KING NADIR SHAH, who now assumed control of the destinies of Afghanistan, was a Durrani Afghan of the Muhammadzai branch, and a direct descendant of Painda Khan, the founder of the dynasty.¹ He was consequently a kinsman of Dost Muhammad's family, being in fact third cousin once removed of Amanullah.

His father, Muhammad Yusaf Khan, was exiled by the Amir Abdur Rahman, and Nadir and his brothers were born and brought up at Dehra Dun in the United Provinces of India. After Abdur Rahman's death the Musahiban family, as they were called, returned to Afghanistan and entered the service of the Amir Habibullah. In 1919 they were arrested for complicity in his assassination² but were shortly afterwards released by Amanullah, who found no cause of suspicion against them. Shortly afterwards Nadir Khan was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Afghan army, and in this capacity took part in the Third Afghan War, when he commanded the force which advanced through Khost to the Kurram Valley and seriously upset the British defensive system from the Khyber to the Gumal.³

When we, of the British Legation, first got to know this family in 1922 they were outstanding in Court circles in Kabul for courtesy, good breeding, and a certain indefinable air of authority which distinguished them among their fellow subjects of the Amir. They were men of a ruling race, and, owing perhaps to their early experiences abroad, were also men of the world who did not allow their political outlook to interfere with their personal relationships.

¹ See Appendix IV for a genealogical tree of the principal members of this family.

² Pt. II, Ch. XI.

³ See Pt. II, Ch. XI and XIII.

At this time, i.e. from 1919 to 1924, Nadir Khan, as Commander-in-Chief of the army and more particularly as a popular and influential leader of the tribes, was bitterly opposed to British frontier policy. He had inherited the tradition handed down from Abdur Rahman of the maintenance of the 'prickly hedge' of the tribes as being the main plank of Afghan frontier policy, and in consequence he looked with the gravest misgivings on the activities of the Government of India as manifested in their 'forward policy' of the early post-war period.¹ During the negotiations leading up to the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921 Nadir Khan had been a foremost critic of British frontier policy, and when in 1922 the Amir began to concern himself actively in frontier affairs, his attitude was largely inspired by the influence of his Commander-in-Chief, who took a prominent part in the assemblies of tribal representatives from across the Durand Line which were summoned at this time to Jalalabad. This influence, which though inspired by motives hostile to British interests was in no personal sense anti-British, continued until in April 1924 Nadir Khan was relieved of his post as Commander-in-Chief and sent to Paris as Afghan representative.

This change in Nadir Khan's fortunes and his virtual banishment from the scene on which he was playing so large a part, was a very significant landmark in Afghan affairs. The immediate cause of his downfall appears to have been acute differences of opinion with the Minister for War, Sardar Muhammad Wali, who in the previous November had been placed in charge of the department dealing with frontier affairs. Between these two men, the soldier and the civilian, there appears to have been a lack of sympathy and of understanding not unknown in parallel cases in other countries as well as Afghanistan. It is probable also that Nadir Khan's great prestige and influence with the tribes made him an object of suspicion to the Amir at the very moment when the rebellious tribesmen of the Southern Province were seeking a leader to rally and inspire them.

But in the broader issues of Afghan policy the dismissal of Nadir Khan marks a turning-point in the career of Amanullah. The genius of rulers lies rather in their ability, or one might say their instinct, to select the right men to guide their footsteps than in any innate administrative proficiency of their own. To

¹ For details of this policy see Ch. XIII.

choose the right man among many, to know whom to listen to and whom to ignore, to sift good advice from bad, to grasp the essentials and discard the rest, these are the qualities that make for success whether it be ruling a country or in the lesser affairs of life. And it is strange how the strong men turn to the strong and the weak men to the weak in such circumstances, for the man who cannot take advice but must have 'Yes-men' round him is a weak man and in the end will fail.

So it was with Amanullah. At this most critical juncture of his career he discarded a strong, loyal, and patriotic adviser and turned to the advice of weak men like Muhammad Wali, and of scoundrels like the members of the Charkhi family. In so doing he brought disaster on his country and on himself. For Nadir Khan it was a period of deep distress and humiliation, but from which in the end he profited greatly. He remained for two years as Afghan Minister in Paris, during which time he had many opportunities to study the post-war world of Europe, and where among other contacts he met and enjoyed the friendship of Lord Crewe, at that time British Ambassador in Paris, whose kindness made a lasting impression on an unhappy exile. For Nadir Khan prophesied when leaving Kabul in 1924 that Amanullah's hasty and ill-considered reforms would lead before long to his country's ruin and his own downfall. Every report he received from his relatives and friends in the country served to strengthen this dire conviction till, in the autumn of 1926, he could stand it no longer. His health was severely affected, a return to Afghanistan impossible, and the outlook for the future black indeed. He resigned his appointment in Paris and repaired to Grasse in southern France, where he was joined by his brothers, Sardar Hashim Khan¹ and Sardar Shah Wali Khan.² There they bided their time, and awaited better days.

On arriving in southern Afghanistan on their great adventure they were joined by their youngest brother, Sardar Shah Mahmud,³ who had remained in Afghanistan. It was these four brothers who in the last days of October 1929 found themselves

¹ Afterwards Prime Minister, 1929-47.

² Afterwards Afghan representative in London and subsequently in Paris, 1929-47.

³ The present Prime Minister. There was also S. Muhammad Aziz, not so distinguished as the other four, who became Afghan representative in Moscow and subsequently in Berlin.

in precarious possession of Kabul, and faced with as difficult a task as has ever fallen to the lot of man.

They reached Kabul with little more than the clothes they stood up in, and what was left of the sums collected from their friends in India. The Bachha had made off with and effectively concealed any cash remaining in the Treasury. There was neither an army to restore order, nor police to maintain it if restored, and there were several thousand triumphant tribesmen, undisciplined and hungry for loot, demanding either a just reward for their services or permission to seek it for themselves. Permission was granted, and Nadir had to stand by while all Government buildings¹ and even the French Legation² were stripped of every article of value.

The immediate task confronting the victors was the establishment of a central authority. Nadir Shah had for some time realized that he must break with the past, and that any attempt to restore Amanullah would be an immediate signal for further outbreaks. As far back as the time of his entry into Afghanistan in the previous spring he had hinted at the possibility of his accepting the throne if he were compelled to do so, and it is no exaggeration to say that had he made any attempt in 1929 to restore Amanullah to the throne he would have plunged his country once more into anarchy and chaos. Moreover, it is very doubtful whether from the outset any such intention had crossed his mind. Nadir Shah was a patriot who loved his country with a fervour which was fanatical in its intensity, and who believed that he himself had been chosen by God to lead the Afghan people along the path of prosperity and peace. On 16 October therefore he accepted his election to the throne by the vote of his victorious army and of the people of Kabul, who were only too glad to show their gratitude to the man who had rescued them from nine months of terror. His first public act a fortnight later was to sign the Bachha's death warrant, a deed for which he was at the time severely criticized. Subsequent information, however, showed that the brigand surrendered unconditionally

¹ The looting was most effective. The tribesmen cut up and removed even the magnificent carpet from the staircase of the Dilkusha Palace, while for many years afterwards medals, ornaments, and other trophies once the property of the departed royal family kept turning up in the bazars along the frontier.

² The British Legation, though severely damaged at the time of Amanullah's downfall, escaped untouched on this occasion.



THE ASIRAF VALLEY, NORTHERN HINDU KUSH

after being deserted by his followers, and that his execution was demanded by the tribal army then in complete control of Kabul. By the beginning of November Nadir was able to turn his attention to the formation of a policy with which to approach the formidable task which lay before him.

The general lines of his policy were indicated in a declaration issued by the Government in the middle of November. The main point of the declaration was the intention to base the administration on the Islamic Hanafi law and so to dissociate the new régime from the frenzied modernism of Amanullah, while at the same time conciliating the priestly class. It had also the advantage of establishing on a firm basis a state religion which in Nadir's eye would be likely to prove the best possible preventative to the spread of subversive doctrines. But while orthodoxy was to be resumed, progress was not neglected. The declaration foreshadowed a development of education together with the establishment of a military school and arsenal. Communications of all kinds were to be restored and improved, arrears of revenue were to be recovered, and commercial agreements established with foreign powers, with whom the diplomatic relations of the previous régime were to be continued.

To carry out this policy Nadir set up a Cabinet of ten members in charge of the various departments of State, with his brothers Sardars Hashim Khan and Shah Mahmud, as Prime and War Ministers respectively. The remaining Ministers were chosen from his own family or from among his friends, avoiding so far as possible persons who had been prominently connected with the ex-King. He re-established the Great Assembly composed of delegates from each tribe and province throughout the country to the number of 286 persons. It met in September 1930 to confirm the dethronement of Amanullah and the succession of Nadir. From it were then chosen 105 persons to form a National Council under a President which would sit at regular intervals throughout the year. A year later an Upper House consisting of twenty-seven 'intelligent and farseeing' persons was created. The professed function of the Council was to act partly as a consultative body and partly to pass important legislation which would thereby be given the appearance of conforming to national sentiment. The delegates were, however, selected in a manner

to ensure that this first essay in democratic control by a legislature in no way hampered the executive in the passing of measures which were deemed necessary for the welfare of the state. Even the Cabinet possessed at the outset of Nadir's reign little authority. Jealousy of the new régime, pro-Amanullah sentiment, and a great paucity of officials combining honesty with intelligence rendered the task of finding administrators on whom he could rely one of extreme difficulty. The consequence was a highly centralized administration which for the first two years of its existence ruled mainly by a mixture of conciliation, bluff, and severity, while the country gradually returned to normality. At the same time King Nadir had no intention of appearing less orthodox in constitutional and legislative matters than Amanullah. Immediately after his accession he repealed the written constitution on which his predecessor's Government had foundered, and replaced it in October 1931 by a constitution of his own, setting forth the fundamental principles in accordance with which he and his successors would govern the country.

But before then much had been accomplished in the pacification of the country. The Eastern Province and Qandahar were soon brought under control; the Koh-i-Daman Valley just north of Kabul, the home of the Bachha and at the best of times a lawless area, proved more difficult. Finally, in the summer of 1930, a dangerous insurrection within a few miles of the capital impelled the King to call in the tribes to his help. It was a desperate move, which restored the situation. But it involved the presence of many thousands of well-armed tribesmen 'on the loose' in the vicinity of the capital, and it took all the diplomacy of the rulers to shepherd them back to their homes without fighting among themselves or looting the bazars of the city.

A month or two later the festival, inaugurated by Amanullah to commemorate Afghan independence, was once more celebrated on the great parade ground outside the city. It is interesting to compare it with the corresponding festival held ten years later, for the comparison symbolizes something of the progress made in those ten years in the evolution of Afghanistan. In 1930 the festival partook rather of the nature of a family party, in which the King was little more than *primus inter pares*, a chieftain among chiefs, who was distinguished more by reason

of his personality than by reason of his office.¹ Informality was the keynote of the whole festival, which made up, in the simplicity and cordial friendliness so characteristic of Nadir Shah and his brothers, for what it lacked in ceremony and display. The military parade was remarkable. The garrison of Kabul consisted of little more than 2,000 men with scanty equipment, but the parade was headed by many hundreds of representatives of those tribes, mainly from the Indian side of the Durand Line, who had formed the spearhead of Nadir Shah's attack on Kabul twelve months before.

Ten years later the scene was very different. There was the same hospitality, for even under the shadow of war the Afghans are ever mindful of their duties as hosts, but there was not quite the same simple friendliness. Nadir Shah was no longer there, and the kingship, which had devolved on his son, Zahir Shah, had assumed a more formal pattern; there was greater ceremony and more display. The festival was run with increased efficiency; the displays, such as the parade of young athletes from various schools and institutions, were carefully thought out and arranged; the contrast in organization, not only with Amanullah's time, but also with the early days of the present régime, was striking. On parade in 1940 was the Kabul garrison, 15,000 strong, well armed and equipped with the complicated armament of modern war, while overhead a formation of the small but remarkably efficient Afghan air force flew past. Well might the surviving royal brothers as they watched the parades, and looked back at all the hazards and difficulties they had surmounted, be proud of so great an achievement in so short a time.

But the hazards had been many. By the end of 1930 most of Afghanistan south of the Hindu Kush, except for the turbulent Khost area of the Southern Province, was under effective control; the Bachha's governor of Herat had tendered his allegiance; the province was quiescent and could be dealt with later. Only the northern provinces remained out of control and lawless. A

¹ I remember a good instance on this occasion of the King's 'way' with his subjects. He was seated surrounded by officials watching a display of tribal dancing, when a number of chiefs in their anxiety to see the show pushed their way in front of the royal party. Police immediately intervened and trouble seemed likely when the King with a gesture stopped the police and bade the tribesmen sit on the grass in front of him. Order was at once restored, everyone got a good view of the show, and the chiefs had the seat of honour at the King's feet.

Basmachi outlaw from Farghana in Russian territory, Ibrahim Beg by name, and an adherent of the Bachha, had for some time been using the northern provinces as a base from which to wage a private war against his Soviet enemies across the Oxus. The Afghan Government, preoccupied with affairs nearer home, had been unable to take effective action against him. Finally in June the Soviet authorities in Turkestan lost patience, and either with the idea of capturing Ibrahim Beg or perhaps merely in order to compel the Afghan Government to deal with him themselves, crossed the Oxus with a considerable force and penetrated as far as forty miles southward.¹ This flagrant violation of their boundaries stung the Afghan Government to action. But the Koh-i-Daman rebellion intervened and it was not until the close of the year that Sardar Shah Mahmud, the Commander-in-Chief, could be spared to take over command in the north. He crossed the Hindu Kush in December with some difficulty by the Khawak Pass, and proceeded to deal with Ibrahim Beg, who was helped to some extent by the size of the area in which he was operating, and by the lack of communications. By April 1931 he was driven across the Oxus and shortly afterwards captured by Soviet forces. The province, whose Uzbeg inhabitants are not naturally pugnacious, quickly returned to normal under the firm but conciliatory policy of Shah Mahmud, and devoted their attention once again to the more profitable tasks of cattle-breeding and sheep-farming, for which the northern areas are noted. Their submission and the masterly handling of one problem after another by King Nadir and his brothers had a powerful influence on the attitude of the Governor of Herat who, by the end of 1931, had consented to the reincorporation of his province within the Afghan Kingdom.

So ended a most critical period in the story of the Hindu Kush, a period when on more than one occasion the fate of the buffer state and the stability of Central Asia had hung in the balance, and a false move might well have precipitated disaster. All the more remarkable is it that, when Afghanistan's first entry into the comity of nations had ended in utter failure, the moment should have brought forth the man, or rather the men, to rescue

¹ This was the first and so far as I know the last occasion on which Soviet forces have violated the northern boundary of Afghanistan since it was laid down.

her from chaos and dismemberment, to restore authority, and to set her forward once more on the difficult quest for internal tranquillity, economic stability, and external good fellowship.

As in Amanullah's time, so once again the opportunity was offered to the ruler of Afghanistan to mould the future and shape the destinies of an undeveloped country and people, to plan wisely, to study and strive to understand the men for whom he was planning, to lead them rather than drive them but at the same time to ensure that progress, though it must perforce be slow, was certain. But Nadir had a harder task than Amanullah. The latter's failure had swung the pendulum back towards extreme orthodoxy and reactionary tendencies, it had temporarily ruined the country's finances, destroyed its armies and disrupted its economy. And, what was perhaps most difficult of all, there remained in Afghanistan after Amanullah's flight a strong body of opinion which for either sentimental or selfish motives looked askance at King Nadir Shah as being in reality but one of themselves, and though a Muhammadzai Durrani not a direct descendant of the 'Great Amir' Dost Muhammad. Nadir Shah in fact did not take over a going concern; he took over a bankrupt business whose shareholders viewed him at best with the critical respect inspired by his personality if not by his claims to rule, and at worst with envy and malice almost amounting to hatred. All the more is credit due to him not only for what he performed but also for the foundations of future development which he laid. We will see later on how his policy developed after his death; his actual achievements during the four years of his reign are remarkable enough. In this short time he created an army of some 40,000 men, and dealt successfully with three serious rebellions. He built a road through the Hindu Kush, raised the revenue to a figure which it is believed never to have attained in Amanullah's reign, and made the highways of the country safer than they had ever been. In 1931 the British Government helped him to the extent of 10,000 rifles and about £180,000 in cash, a generous gift it is true, but hardly adequate to account for the restoration of law and order and comparative prosperity among a naturally turbulent people, inhabiting a country somewhat larger than France. He received no other help at all from external sources.

Of all King Nadir's feats of administration perhaps the most

remarkable in its effect on the future development of the country was the building of the 'Great North Road' through the Hindu Kush. I have already referred to this road,¹ and have described it elsewhere.² But the story of its construction is worth repeating, it has in it the hall-mark of administrative genius, and it is an important part of the history of the Hindu Kush.

I have already noted that in the winter of 1930-1 the King's brother, Sardar Shah Mahmud, had been obliged to cross the Khawak Pass (11,640 feet) in order to deal with a rebellion in northern Afghanistan. The difficulties of this journey brought home forcibly to the King how essential it was to find some means of connecting the capital with the Northern Provinces by a route less circuitous than the long way round by Qandahar and Herat, and less hazardous than the stony tracks over the mountain passes, most of which were snowbound in winter and none of which could be made fit for wheeled traffic without immense labour and expense. Historical precedents, however, provided no solution for this problem. We have already seen that from earliest days there were several routes across the passes covering a span of about 150 miles and all converging on the valleys north and west of Kabul. Of these the route by the Panjshir River and the Khawak Pass was generally supposed to be the easiest, though Babur had used a different route.³ But there was another way which was much used in Buddhist times, in the days when all roads converged on Balkh, the great city of the Oxus Valley. It ran westwards from the old capital Kapisa, situated at the junction of the Ghorband and Panjshir Rivers, mounted the Ghorband Valley for seventy miles and then climbed the Shibar Pass (9,800 feet) on to the high upland slopes of the Koh-i-Baba Range. Thence continuing westward it entered the Bamiyan Valley and followed it past the old red fortress of Zohak, and the great Buddhas standing in their niches, till it reached and mounted the Ak Robot Pass (12,500 feet) and yet another pass, the Dandan Shikan, before dropping into the Kahmerd Valley and rejoining at Doaba the waters that flowed by Bamiyan. This was the main route taken by the early pilgrims and at a later date it was the route down which Chenghiz Khan carried

¹ See Pt. I, Ch. I, p. 9.

² In the journal of the Royal Central Asian Society, Vol. XXIX, April 1942.

³ See Pt. I, Ch. I.

slaughter and destruction through the fair valleys of the Hindu Kush. But until the coming of the motor-car no one had thought of building a highway over this rugged mountain track.

Amanullah was the first to attempt to find a passage for wheeled traffic through the Hindu Kush to connect northern and southern Afghanistan by a direct route. The idea, like many of Amanullah's ideas, was admirable, but when it came to carrying it out he failed: he lacked the knowledge and the constancy of purpose required for such an undertaking. He drove his cart-road up the Ghorband Valley over the Shibar Pass and down its western slopes and ravines till it reached the river of Bamiyan at a point where turning northward this stream enters the great gorge of the Darra-i-Shikari, that stupendous ravine which cuts right through the main ridge of the Hindu Kush. But Amanullah's engineers turned back, as others had done before them, from that fearsome rockbound way and took their road up the Bamiyan River and on and up the Ak Robat Pass to the summit, and there they left it unfinished and quite useless. Some years later I climbed the Ak Robat to the summit and sat on a cairn where the road ends and wondered why Amanullah had carried it no further. Perhaps the fierce gradient near the summit had frightened his engineers or perhaps the money ran out; at any rate it got no further and gradually crumbled to pieces, an unhappy monument to the impetuous folly of its originator.

A few years later Amanullah tried again, and this time entrusted the task of constructing a road to Russian engineers, who strangely enough missed the significance of the Darra-i-Shikari. They surveyed all other possible routes and chose the Salang ravine, just north of the Ghorband. It was perhaps the worst route they could have chosen, and they did not get very far. The revolution of 1929 put an end to their efforts, and the roaring Salang stream very soon put an end to the twenty bridges they had erected. Thus it was that when Nadir Shah ascended the Afghan throne the problem of how to connect the Oxus and the Indus Valleys by a direct motor road was still unsolved.

Political necessity, the prescience of a born administrator, and a real knowledge of the country he was dealing with furnished King Nadir with an understanding of the problem confronting him and a spur to drive him to the completion of a most formidable

task. The key to the problem is the fact that the Shibar Pass, though much lower than the main ridge of the Hindu Kush to the north of it and the Koh-i-Baba Range to the south, and standing at right angles to both, forms the watershed of the Indus and Oxus basins.¹ Once across the Shibar, which is rarely snowbound in winter, the route runs downhill all the way to the plains of Turkestan, provided it turns northward down the Bamiyan River, and not up it and over the Ak Robat or Nil Passes. Thus stated the problem sounds absurdly simple, but the fact remains that for over 2,000 years, the caravans and the armies and the pilgrims, the great conquerors and the simple wayfarers, passed and repassed along that way, facing the blizzards and the mud and the piercing winds of the high ridges, and no one, until Nadir came, ever seems to have realized that there was another way.

It was a much better way, but it was by no means an easy road to survey or to build. For nearly forty miles the river runs through a series of most formidable gorges and no man had ever traversed them from end to end. I went down once in 1932 to the end of the road, to where a thousand workmen were cutting, digging, and blasting their way along a steep shale slope with the river roaring fifty feet below them. I spoke to the foreman in charge :

‘Where are you going?’ I asked.

‘To Turkestan,’ he replied.

‘When do you expect to get there?’

‘Khuda Midanand (God knows),’ he said. ‘We’re just going on till we do.’

The road was completed in 1933, a few months before King Nadir’s death, and we shall hear of it again. But the answer given by the engineer was typical of the man who spoke it, and an epitome of the régime under which he worked.

Where were they going, these four brothers, toiling selflessly for the good of their country through every kind of frustration and disappointment and hazard, towards a goal which at best they could only see dimly, and often could not see at all? Many a time they must have hardly known where they were going amid

¹ An interesting point is the absence of trout in the Ghorband River to the east of the pass. A few miles further to the west of it the little Bulola stream is full of the *Salmo Oxianus*, the delicious brown trout of the Oxus Valley.

the fog of uncertainty and the cross-currents of intrigue which surrounded them. But they just carried on, full of confidence in themselves and in their mission to lead the Afghan people, and imbued with that strange Islamic fatalism which would put a literal interpretation on their engineer's words: 'Only God knows where we are going; our job is to go on till we get there!'

In shaping his foreign policy King Nadir found his hardest task. His aim was to rebuild the buffer state, to fulfil his undertakings as a sovereign ruler, to be at peace with all the world, and particularly with his two great neighbours, but to show preference for neither Britain nor Russia. In pursuit of this policy he adjusted the balance which at the end of Amanullah's reign had been somewhat weighted in favour of the Soviet Government, by the elimination of all Russian personnel from the air force, and their replacement by Afghans. He also refused to accept Soviet proposals for penetration into the country in the guise of commercial missions to be established at various centres. At the same time he was careful not to let the pendulum swing too far. No British nationals were employed in any capacity throughout the country. Even in educational matters, while the French and German schools established by Amanullah were reopened and restaffed from Europe, the teaching of English was entrusted to Indian teachers with the result that while many young Afghans spoke excellent German and French, very few knew more than a few words of English. But fewer still knew any Russian.

It was on the frontiers, however, that the real problems arose. In the north there was not much trouble. The Oxus was broad enough effectually to separate two states which wished to live at peace with each other, and although the lack of precision as to where the boundary actually ran¹ gave rise to periodical bickerings between the two Governments, very little practical inconvenience resulted. Only in the north-west, where the boundary though precisely laid down was frequently ignored by the Turkmen shepherds in search of grazing, did some difficulties arise. The flocks of Karakul sheep² were too valuable an asset to either country to be lightly surrendered or restored should

¹ See Pt. II, Ch. IX (2), p. 170.

² The little black sheep of Turkestan from which come the famous lambskins or astrakhan.

they stray across the border, and their wanderings gave rise at times to some diplomatic tension. But the Uzbeks and other Turkish tribes which inhabit both sides of the Oxus Valley are on the whole peaceful folk who dwell in a country of great potential wealth, and are too occupied with husbandry in its various forms to have either the time or the inclination for quarrels.

Far different is the case on the south-eastern borders of Afghanistan, where, as we have already seen, an inhospitable country has bred as quarrelsome and intractable a set of people as is to be found anywhere on earth. In a later chapter¹ I am dealing in some detail with the tribal problem as a whole. I propose to confine myself here to a discussion of King Nadir Shah's attitude towards this problem, and the effect of his attitude on his fortunes.

In the spring of 1930 I had an opportunity to discuss this question with Mr. (afterwards Sir Richard) Maconachie, the newly appointed British Minister to Afghanistan, who was then on his way to Kabul. Maconachie as Counsellor of the Legation had known Nadir Shah in the early days of Amanullah's reign when Nadir was a powerful advocate for the retention of Afghan influence across the Durand Line, and for the support of the tribes against British penetration. As Political Agent in the Kurram Valley, he had met and talked with him again, as Nadir and his brothers paused at Parachinar in the summer of 1929 before setting forth on their valiant attempt to restore authority in the Afghan Kingdom. Between the two men had grown up a mutual liking and respect, and no better envoy could possibly have been sent to represent British interests at the Court of Kabul during those troublous years, where as ever in Afghanistan the personal touch counted for so much. But Maconachie, who knew Nadir so well, knew that his own personal influence would count but little when weighed in the scales against the new King's intense, indeed fanatical, patriotism and zeal to further his country's interests. Would he resume where he had left off the championship of his fellow tribesmen's cause in their desperate struggle to preserve their freedom against the forward policy of Britain, and in so doing disregard all international boundaries and treaty obligations as Amanullah had done? Or would the years of exile have taught him that there

¹ Pt. II, Ch. XIII.

are issues more vital than the brief popularity deriving from support of some local interest, and that no country, and particularly no country so lately entered into the comity of nations, can long prosper which disregards the sanctity of international obligations? ¹

So far the omens had been favourable. A month after Nadir Shah's arrival in Kabul he intimated his desire to send his brother, Sardar Shah Wali Khan, as his representative at the Court of St. James's.² Shah Wali reached London in January 1930 and by his courtesy and friendliness at once made a favourable impression on a Government which had been somewhat plagued by the idiosyncrasies of his predecessors. In May the validity of the Treaty of 1921 and of the Trade Convention which followed it, was reaffirmed by an exchange of notes. The real test, however, was not in assurances given in London, but in policy formulated and implemented in Kabul. In June 1930 the King told the British Minister that the whole frontier policy of the Afghan Government would be actuated by a desire for peace on both sides of the frontier, and a spirit of true friendship towards His Majesty's Government.

Fine words these, but did they mean what they said, or were they just empty phrases, signifying nothing? To many in India it seemed impossible that the leopard should change his spots; Nadir Shah had once been 'anti-British' in his frontier policy, and with that terrible bureaucratic habit of sticking labels on to people and leaving them there, anti-British he remained to the end of his life. Nor was it hard to find some evidence to support such a theory. It would be difficult to over-estimate the military weakness of the Afghan Government in the early thirties when compared with the fighting strength of the great tribes. For the sake of their own safety the Afghan rulers had to temporize at times, and to appear in tribal eyes at any rate to be pursuing a policy not greatly at variance with that of their predecessors.

But they did their best.³ Again and again in those troublous

¹ It will be remembered that Nadir Shah's sojourn in Europe coincided with a period when the League of Nations was still flourishing and it seemed possible that international law and order would prevail. Hitler had not yet emerged and the other gangsters were not yet unduly prominent.

² Another brother, Sardar Muhammad Aziz, was sent as Ambassador to Moscow.

³ For details of the frontier situation at this time, see Ch. XIII.

days, during the Red Shirt and Afridi troubles of 1930-1 and in the Mohmand operations of 1933, deputations of tribesmen who had come to ask for help against the British were sent back from Kabul with nothing to show for their trouble but some salutary advice. The policy may be said to have been negative, but it was as far as the King dared to go. No tribesman, disturbed at British penetration of the frontier areas, received either help or encouragement to take up arms against this relentless pressure on his freedom. Such a policy had its inevitable reactions on tribal opinion, where the King's efforts to carry out the undertakings required by international comity, coupled with the fact made public at the end of 1931 that he had received British help in money and munitions, led to the accusation against him of subservience to British frontier policy. This charge, as foolish as it was unjust, spread along the frontier and was quickly seized on by the pro-Amanullah party as a principal weapon of propaganda.

How far this party, which supported the direct line of descent from Dost Muhammad, had any intention of replacing Amanullah on the throne is doubtful. His disastrous policy, his personal unpopularity, and the stigma of cowardice attached, perhaps unjustly, to his name rendered his restoration wellnigh impossible. But he remained a figurehead for his more capable adherents and a rallying-point for malcontents. So long as he was alive he was likely to prove a disturbing factor in the Afghan situation, and to form a focus for the intrigue of all those who opposed the foreign policy of King Nadir Shah, or who were discontented with a régime so uncomfortably orthodox and economical.

But, whatever their ultimate objective may have been, their immediate intention was to make things as uncomfortable for Nadir Shah as possible. The charge that the King had sold himself to the Devil, personified by the British, was a powerful weapon. It was a weapon which had proved effective as far back as 1842. It was reinforced by the widely held belief that the British Government in some mysterious but masterly fashion had engineered the downfall of Amanullah because of his friendship with Russia, and replaced him with a man of their choice who was now their puppet. By the summer of 1932 the seeds of disaffection had been sown and the moment seemed ripe for further action.

The activities of the Amanullah party had not gone unheeded in Kabul. They were met by a campaign of counter-propaganda abroad and by extreme watchfulness at home. At the same time the King's position among his own people was not sufficiently strong to permit him to dispense with the services of any Afghan of importance who was prepared to profess repentance and to adhere to his cause. This readiness on the King's part to overlook past offences on condition of future loyalty induced Amanullah's principal adherents, the notorious Charkhi family, to launch a daring scheme to overthrow the Government.

We have already noted the effort made by the senior member of this family, Ghulam Nabi, to re-enter Afghanistan with Russian help in 1929.¹ He was a man who would stick at nothing to gain his ends. Now, through his agents in Afghanistan, he began to foment rebellion in the notoriously restless Southern Province where Nadir Shah's Government had hitherto made little headway, and where Ghulam Nabi himself retained some influence from a previous period of Governorship. In July 1932 the time seemed ripe and Ghulam Nabi, professing loyalty, asked for and obtained permission to return to Kabul. Before he arrived in Afghanistan one of his principal adherents had been arrested in the Southern Province, but Ghulam Nabi persevered with his plan.

He reached Kabul in the middle of October and a few days later was presented to the King at a reception in the Dilkusha Palace. It was a notable occasion. It happened that all five of the royal brothers were present in Kabul, meeting for the last time, as it turned out, to discuss their future plans. They were all present at this reception as also were the notables of Kabul and the diplomatic corps. Into the thronged reception hall came His Majesty, passing round with a greeting and a kindly word to his guests. As he returned to the centre of the hall Ghulam Nabi was brought up to be presented. We who watched felt the tension of the moment, noted the unruffled courtesy of the King's greeting, and will never forget the look of hatred and malice on Ghulam Nabi's evil, crafty face as Nadir Shah turned away after a few brief words. A day or two later the King, who by now was strongly suspicious of his motives in returning to Kabul, offered Ghulam Nabi a suitable pension provided he left

¹ Pt. II, Ch. XI (2), p. 218.

the country and took no further part in politics. Ghulam Nabi pretended to be considering the offer, while actually hastening forward preparations for a revolt in the Southern Province, and endeavouring to win supporters by a lavish distribution of money in Kabul. But his plans were discovered, and early in November the Government had conclusive proof of his treachery and abuse of the safe conduct granted to him. On 8 November he was summoned before the King who charged him with high treason, for which there was documentary evidence, and demanded his explanation. Ghulam Nabi replied with prevarication and abuse, whereupon the King ordered his instant execution.

Such precipitate action was a cardinal error, perhaps the only error in judgement on a major issue made by Nadir Shah, who paid for it a year later with his own life. At the time he tried to repair his mistake by placing the undoubted proofs of Ghulam Nabi's guilt before three separate bodies, who affirmed that he had been justly executed. But the King's autocratic action aroused much feeling against him throughout the country.¹

To the political struggle between the pro-Amanullah party and the ruling house was now added the personal character of a Pathan blood feud between the Charkhi and Musahiban families, which augmented the bitterness of feeling already existing between the parties. Anti-Government propaganda increased in Afghanistan, but the next blow fell in Europe where in June Sardar Muhammad Aziz, brother of the King and Afghan Minister in Berlin, was assassinated by an Afghan student as he left his house. The murderer announced that his action was intended as a protest against the predominance of British influence in Afghanistan, a motive which provided the Charkhi family with a ready weapon for the prosecution of their feud. Tension was now rising in Afghanistan. Anti-Government propaganda received an impetus from the operations in Mohmand country undertaken in July by the Government of India in pursuance of their forward policy, which gave an opportunity for the appearance in the Turkish newspaper *Jamhuriyet* of a cartoon of Aman-

¹ Kings cannot do such things with impunity, though their subjects can and do. Nadir's action reminds one of the proverbial Jeddard justice of the Scottish border :

' I oft have heard of Lydford law,
Where in the morn men hang and draw
And sit in judgement after ! '

ullah studying a map of Mohmand country with a caption to the effect that the ex-King would never have allowed such an outrage.

Not for the first time the opponents of the Royal House of Afghanistan took advantage of the ever-present suspicions of undue British influence in the country. Reports that the British had 'secretly acquired Afghanistan' provided the stimulus for a further outrage, three members of the British Legation this time being the victims. Stern measures were then adopted against leaders of the revolutionary party still in Kabul, another member of the Charkhi family was executed, and numerous arrests were made. Feeling throughout the country was now acute and special precautions were taken in Kabul to guard the King's life. But a combination of Muslim fatalism and local inefficiency prevented these measures from being effective. A military review fixed for 16 October was cancelled, but on 8 November, the anniversary of Ghulam Nabi's execution, the King insisted, in spite of warnings, on attending a school prize-giving in the grounds of the Dilkusha Palace. As he passed along the ranks of the boys, a natural son of Ghulam Nabi, who had recently been released from custody, stepped forward and shot the King, killing him instantaneously.

It was a critical moment in the story of the Hindu Kush. The eldest of the King's brothers, Sardar Hashim Khan, was absent on a tour of the Northern Provinces, accompanied by two prominent members of the Cabinet. The only member of the Government in Kabul with any real authority was the youngest of the royal brothers, Sardar Shah Mahmud, the War Minister. If historical precedents had been followed he would have imprisoned his nephew, bribed the army, and seized the throne, the treasury, and the arsenal. But, though he acted with promptitude and decision, he did none of these things. The devotion and the loyalty which Nadir Shah inspired during his lifetime in the hearts of all who served him personally, and indeed in the hearts of the vast majority of his subjects, welded his family into a closely knit body, so that when he died his brothers had no thought save to obey his wishes and to carry on the Government of the country in a manner best calculated to eliminate all cause of internecine strife and to promote its steady progress.

Sardar Shah Mahmud took immediate steps to ensure the accession of the King's son, Prince Zahir Shah, the lawful heir to

the throne. By 6 p.m. that night a royal salute fired from the Palace showed that the new King had been accepted in Kabul, and within a few days all the provinces and frontier tribes had signed deeds of allegiance to the new King. Contrary to all expectations and to local precedents, the new reign began without a disturbance of any kind. This fact alone showed clearly that the assassination had not been planned by the leaders of Amanullah's party within the country, whom it found unprepared to take advantage of the situation for which they had hoped so long.

(2)

Among his own people and by some foreign observers King Nadir Shah was held after his death to compare favourably with any of his predecessors, and indeed by his achievements and by the foundations of stability and good government which he laid to have deserved the title of a 'great' administrator.

It is not easy to define the true significance of greatness in a ruler. But I think one can say this much. At this period there were in two Islamic countries of the Near and Middle East rulers who, each in his own fashion, might be called 'great': Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, and Reza Shah in Persia. They were great because each rescued his country from decadence and disintegration, re-established order and restored authority, and endeavoured, though in the case of Reza Shah not very successfully, to bring his people into line with the progress of modern civilization. Most of us have heard and read of these two men, but few could name with them any recent ruler of Afghanistan save the unhappy if colourful Amanullah. Nadir Shah never caught the imagination of the world, and in the last twenty years Afghanistan has been one of those fortunate countries on which the limelight of great events has not shone. And thus the world has never noticed the fact that there was a third Islamic country, whose ruler in his quiet, methodical, far-seeing way was rescuing it in the early thirties from disruption, and laying within it firm foundations for the structure of a modern state and for the maintenance of the peace of Central Asia.

On these foundations the present rulers of Afghanistan have

built, and from their work has grown an edifice sufficiently strong to withstand the internal stresses of a growing nation, and the external strains of international rivalries and of world war. It is still perhaps too soon to pass a final verdict on the results of Nadir Shah's work, nor is it easy to describe fairly a period of history in which the narrator himself has played a part. But I must bring the story of the Hindu Kush up to date, and in so doing pass briefly in review some of the main features of King Zahir Shah's reign.

I have affirmed that Nadir Shah was a great administrator. But he would have been the first to admit the debt which he owed to the loyal, unselfish co-operation of his brothers, and particularly of His Royal Highness, Sardar Hashim Khan. The combination of the King and his brother produced a wellnigh perfect form of benevolent autocracy which in the state of Afghan society in 1929 was the only possible form of Government. Nadir's wise, far-seeing, but almost too lenient attitude to public affairs was strengthened by Hashim's powerful, virile strength of character and mind, while the latter's tendency to ruthless and impetuous action was controlled by his sovereign's temperate judgement. In matters of defence they had the loyal co-operation of their youngest brother, Shah Mahmud, while Shah Wali, 'The Conqueror of Kabul', kept a watchful eye first from London and then from Paris on Afghan interests in Europe and on the movements of the ex-King. It was a remarkable combination, rare in any society or walk of life, and as we have seen quite unprecedented in the annals of the Durrani dynasties of Afghanistan. It was said by many in a position to be able to form a judgement that this combination rested on the fraternal loyalty inspired by Nadir Shah, and that it would not survive his death. Such an opinion was natural, indeed it was almost inevitable. The power to instil true loyalty into the hearts of those who work for you is not very common nor is it very noticeable. Perhaps Nadir's best title to greatness is the fact that loyalty to his memory was powerful enough to overcome the natural ambitions of his brothers, so that they without hesitation rallied round their nephew, Zahir Shah, placed him on the throne, and set to work to maintain the administration and follow the policy initiated by his father.

At the time of his accession Zahir Shah was a youth of nineteen who had been brought up in France and educated in Paris.

He returned to Afghanistan in 1930 and though little was heard of him he was known to be engaged in military and other studies befitting the heir-apparent to the throne.¹ He was at this time a young man with a pleasant courteous manner who was known to be a fine horseman and a keen shot. He had also latent in him something of his father's quiet authority and natural dignity. But in 1933 he was as yet too young to assume active control of so difficult a country, and it was obvious that for some time to come his uncles would have to shoulder the responsibility for the affairs of the Government. It was in such circumstances that H.R.H. Sardar Hashim Khan, the Prime Minister, became for upwards of fourteen years the virtual ruler of Afghanistan.

It was a difficult and at times dangerous task. To it Hashim Khan brought qualities of statesmanship and administrative ability which were to prove of lasting value to his country. He applied himself to the business of governing Afghanistan with a zeal and thoroughness which made him respected and feared throughout the length and breadth of the King's dominions. A man of high personal integrity and straightforward character, he believed in plain speaking and in resolute action.² He sought neither fame nor popularity but devoted his whole energy to the welfare and prosperity of the country and to the management of his nephew's unruly subjects. Long experience and his brother's example had taught him how to handle the tribal and religious leaders. With them he was generally popular, but his hatred of corruption, and ruthless treatment of inefficiency or crooked dealing, made for him many enemies in a country which was still suffering from the lax control of the previous régimes. In private Hashim Khan was a man of much charm, with a keen sense of humour and a ready sympathy for and interest in others, which, combined with a dignified presence, made him an outstanding figure in any assembly. He was in fact as great a man as Nadir Shah though in a different way, and well worthy of

¹ I remember seeing Prince Zahir Shah with his cousin Sardar Daud Shah, equipped with tin helmet and rifle and all the paraphernalia of the modern infantryman, marching past at a very warm Independence Day parade in 1931 or 1932. They then fell out, came back to the royal tent and stood at attention behind the King's chair for the rest of the parade.

² Sardar Hashim Khan was an admirable person to work with. He often reminded me of the prayer of the Duke of Ormonde, friend and adviser of Charles II: 'God send me to deal with men of passion, who will be angry when they are contradicted and be moved by reason that they cannot answer.' See Arthur Bryant's *King Charles II*, Part I, Ch. II.

the very formidable task which confronted him when at the end of 1933 he found himself in sole charge of his country's stability and progress.

For many months after Nadir Shah's death the Government, while taking stern measures to deal with the perpetrator of the crime and others connected with the plot, awaited in some anxiety to see what lay behind it. But as time passed it became evident that the assassination of the King was rather the culmination of a personal quarrel than a manifestation of national dissatisfaction. In fact, it soon became apparent that the majority of the country regretted the loss of a man whose worth they did not truly appreciate until he was dead, and was ready to accept his successor provided he followed in his father's footsteps.

Thus reassured, the Government felt able by 1935 to put into execution a policy of development and progress the general lines of which had been worked out by the late King before his death. This policy rested on two main pillars, the maintenance of internal law and order by the establishment of a really efficient army, well found and equipped with modern weapons, and the development of the country's internal resources so as to enable it to pay its way in the world. Along with these were to go such projects as the spread of secular education throughout the country, the construction of hospitals and the foundation of a medical faculty, the development of irrigation projects, the improvement of communications, the introduction of wireless telegraphy, the exploration of mineral resources, and other similar projects.

But to start such a programme external help was necessary and the Afghan Government, anxious to maintain equilibrium between their nearest neighbours and to avoid political complications, turned to central Europe and principally to Germany for financial credits and for expert assistance. The choice was unfortunate as it turned out, but in 1935 no one could yet foresee what 1939 would bring forth. The Germans had no apparent political axe to grind in Central Asia, they were ready to risk their money in what seemed to orthodox British financiers a doubtful investment, and their experts were most efficient servants of the State whose pay they earned. And some of them, a very few, were zealous Nazis, who were no doubt selected by Hitler's Government as useful propaganda agents and centres of intrigue should the necessity arise. The Germans came, to the

number of perhaps 150, and set to work to build hydro-electric installations and textile and woollen mills, to install cotton ginning factories and to erect plant for the extraction of sugar from beet.

For it was thus that the Afghan Government proposed to make their way in the world. They had the rich open lands of the Oxus Valley on which to cultivate cotton and sugar beet, the vast seasonal pasture grounds on the hillsides of the Hindu Kush to grow the wool of their innumerable flocks, and the grey-green torrents of their swift glacier-fed rivers to harness for all the power they needed. They proposed to be self-supporting in as many as possible of the basic requirements of the people and so reduce the volume of their imports to manageable proportions, and, by introducing a considerable measure of Government control of commerce, to regulate, particularly with the state-trading of their northern neighbours, the flow of imports and exports across their frontiers.

It was not easy to find fault with such a plan, which in essence seemed simple and straightforward enough. And yet there were defects in it and weaknesses which later were to come to light. Complicated machinery imported from great distances is a very vulnerable thing, and it is at least doubtful whether the Asiatic temperament is suited to the care and maintenance of a delicate machine, which cannot be replaced save at a heavy expenditure of time and money. To us who, as it were, watched from the side lines with sympathetic eyes the first endeavours of the Afghans to take part in the difficult game of international economics and trade, it seemed that the Afghan Government might have been better advised to cultivate and develop the assets they possessed already of climate and soil, and the great markets on their north and south to absorb their produce. Experts from India and elsewhere who visited the country reported on the fertility of its soil and on the fine quality of its livestock. Already without selective breeding or expert supervision the lambskins of Afghan Turkestan had made a name for themselves in the markets of the world, while such industries as fruit-growing in southern Afghanistan, already a flourishing export, might be enormously increased to meet the requirements of an unlimited market in India. If to this were added the exploitation of such mineral resources as the country possessed, it seemed possible that the economies of Afghanistan might have been more surely

founded on the basis of the development of its primary products, than on any attempt to make the country self-sufficient by the introduction of machinery.

The arguments in favour of such a policy are valid, but they do not take in all the factors involved, nor could all factors be known save to the rulers themselves. There were certain questions of *amour propre*, the natural desire of any country not to be dependent for too much upon its neighbours, the obvious asset of water-power waiting to be harnessed, and above all perhaps the growing body of young Afghans who had been educated abroad and wished to see their own country develop in a mechanical age along the path of industrialization and mechanized progress. This is understandable and natural; it accounts for certain extravagances in the processes of development,¹ and a certain impatience at the slowness of the process. This attitude of mind accounts too for the extreme sensitiveness of a young people at the backwardness of their country, and for their resentment at criticism and any suggestion of ridicule. All these factors were present in Afghanistan during these early years; they were a natural and indeed healthy development from the stagnation of the tribal society, which had preceded them, but they were factors which had to be watched and guided.

For the basis of Afghan society was still the tribal system. The new social and political order which was growing up had its roots in the tribal soil, and drew its sustenance from the progressive elements among the tribes themselves. But the tribes remained powerful, fanatical, intractable; suspicious of progress, priest-ridden and unstable; liable at any time to destroy the delicate fabric of the nascent state and, should they ever combine against good government and orderly progress, capable once more of plunging Afghanistan into chaos and ruin. They wanted very careful handling, and the task of gradually substituting for the tribal system the normal administrative framework of the civilized state was likely to be prolonged and difficult. There was therefore always a risk of too great a cleavage developing between the progressive minority and the static majority. The young men were inclined to become impatient, to brush aside conservative

¹ Such as a magnificent wireless installation in Kabul with a world-wide range. A Norwegian diplomat, commenting on this, remarked to me as from his own experience that small countries could not afford to buy any but the most expensive articles.

prejudices and the reactionary influences of the priesthood. The older statesmen, like the Prime Minister, knew the dangers inherent in such an attitude. They put the brake on, handled tribal politics with skill and patience, and while slowly building the structure of progress were content to await the civilizing effects of education and good government.

Even so it was not possible wholly to avoid a clash on occasions between a progressive Government and its reactionary subjects. Among these the great Ghilzai tribe was the most formidable and the most difficult.¹ The Ghilzais had never taken kindly to Durrani rule, even Abdur Rahman had found the task of taming them to be long and difficult ; his successors had treated them on the principle of live and let live, until in the end they had dealt Amanullah his final blow.

They had taken little heed of the new régime beyond according a perfunctory expression of allegiance to the rulers in Kabul, and continued to pursue their normal life, carrying their merchandise down to India at the turn of the season and returning in the spring with their long strings of camels laden with goods for sale in the Afghan bazars. They were a law unto themselves, providing their own protection as they crossed the dangerous tribal areas of southern Waziristan, and untrammelled by any fiscal rules or customs regulations. Such a system, or lack of system, was bound sooner or later to clash with the introduction of any regular form of economic control. In 1935 the establishment of customs posts along the main lines of migration, where no such things had ever been before, met with a measure of success, but gave rise to considerable unrest in a community already hard hit by the introduction of mechanical transport and by the slackness of trade. Opposition by the Ghilzais to this unwelcome introduction to a strange new world of rules and regulations led to counter-measures by the Government, which took the form of the erection of forts to be manned by regular troops intended to enforce the new fiscal and other laws. This in turn led in 1937 to open rebellion which was quickly crushed. But many of the rebels took refuge in the frontier hills or in the bazars of India, and returned in 1938 to stir up further trouble for their harassed rulers. This in turn led to some friction with the Government of India, which culminated in the early autumn of 1938 in the

¹ Ghilzais : see Pt. II, Ch. I.

astounding incident of the Shami Pir,¹ and in the eventual pacification of the Ghilzais.

Nor was the introduction of a more general type of education without its difficulties. Here the main obstacle was the priesthood. They feared, and with some reason, the effects of the spread of secular education on the minds of their followers, whose fanatical superstitions they could on occasions exploit with much success. It would take time before the still small voice of reason penetrated the blanket of bigotry and ignorance which enveloped the tribesman's mind, but the Pathan is a quick-witted man, and might learn too easily to follow the Turkish example and sever Church from State. So the *Mullas* endeavoured to oppose the spread of education. They met with little success save for a short period in the remote and fanatical district of Zamindawar, north of Qandahar, but their generally obstructive attitude hampered progress.

But in spite of all these difficulties progress was continuous throughout the 1930s. Schools and factories began to appear, new towns sprang up outside the close confines of the older walled citadels, communications were developed and improved. Mail services were now regular between India and the capital and north along the great new road to the Oxus² or south and west to Gardez and Ghazni and Qandahar. Telegraph and telephone communication spread throughout the country.

Karakul (Afghan lambskin) was still the chief export of Afghanistan, but search went on for a more stable product on which to base the country's external trade. Cotton of a fine, long-staple variety and beet sugar were being cultivated in the Oxus Valley; efforts were made under British experts to develop the great coalfields of the northern Hindu Kush, and an American company surveyed the country for oil.

But over all this human endeavour hung the shadows of events in Europe. In 1934, Afghanistan joined the League of Nations in no very hopeful spirit, but rather because it was at that time a thing to do. It placed Afghanistan in the circle of international affairs. It was interesting to send an envoy to Geneva, who would meet Mr. Eden and Mr. Litvinov and all the other great men, and return to Kabul to retail with urbane cynicism and dry

¹ For details of this curious story, see Ch. XIII.

² See Ch. XII (1), p. 232.

humour the gossip and the stories of the world of international affairs. And there was always the vague hope that the League might afford Afghanistan and other weak nations a measure of protection against possible aggression by their more powerful neighbours.

This hope was rudely shattered when, in 1936, Mussolini, disregarding the protests of the League and the imposition of sanctions, attacked and overran Ethiopia. The moral was plain for Afghanistan to read. The shadowy and unsupported ideals of collective security were a delusion. Great Britain, the chief supporter of the League, had failed to arrest Italian aggression, and had in fact sustained a severe diplomatic defeat at the hands of a people whom the Afghans had hitherto looked on with ridicule and contempt. It was not an easy time for those who had to interpret and defend British policy in foreign lands.¹

It was perhaps fortunate that during this difficult period Afghan and Turkish relations should have become increasingly close and cordial. They had suffered a serious setback at the end of Amanullah's reign, owing to his adherence to Turkish principles of reform entirely unsuited to Afghan conditions, and had remained in a somewhat strained condition for some time thereafter. It was in fact not till after Nadir Shah's death that the attractive and yet influential personality of the new Turkish Ambassador² restored the relations between these two Islamic powers to a condition of really cordial friendship. It was a fortunate relationship. There is a certain similarity between the Turkish and Afghan character strong enough to suggest a probable racial link, and contrasting forcibly with the characteristics of Afghanistan's nearer neighbours of India and Persia. It had the effect of drawing the two countries together, so that the Afghan Government turned towards Turkey for help in such matters as the provision of military instructors and medical professors. In 1934 Afghanistan entered the League of Nations under Turkish auspices and in 1937 signed along with Turkey, Iraq, and Persia the non-aggression pact of Sa'adabad, which

¹ At the end of 1937 British and Italian aircraft purchased by the Afghan Government, with a complement of instructors from each nation, appeared simultaneously on the Sherpur aerodrome at Kabul. The immediate and striking contrast between the two teams and their aircraft did much to restore a correct perspective.

² His Excellency M. Memduh Shevket Isendal.

represented a small, but definite, step forward in the consolidation of Islamic policy along the southern borders of Soviet Russia. At the same time the Turkish attitude towards world affairs, with particular reference to her cordial relations with Great Britain, was carefully noted in Kabul.

It was perhaps as well that this was so, since during this period British policy and Britain's general attitude to world affairs were causing many misgivings in the hearts of those Afghans who traditionally looked on the British as a powerful and steadfast prop of the buffer state. They noted with genuine dismay the pathetic belief of the British people that the moral power of collective security unsupported by any force would provide for the rest of the world as it did for them a basis for the universal peace and disarmament they so greatly desired.¹ In addition there was the curious reluctance of the British Government to respond to very reasonable requests for some credits and assistance in the matter of economic development and military rearmament, a reluctance so out of keeping with the oft-repeated sentiment that the buffer state, if it was to perform its functions, must be strong, stable, and friendly. In addition there was the endless friction over the forward policy on the frontier and the Faqir of Ipi and kindred subjects,² and lastly there was the shadow, faint but discernible, of the British intention to withdraw from India. If that intention was ever translated into action what then was going to happen to the buffer state, and the Hindu Kush, and the whole stability of Central Asia, so patiently and carefully evolved, perfected, and stabilized at the cost of so much blood and treasure? What indeed? Well might the Afghans ask for information as to the real intentions of the British rulers of India.

But, if the Afghans were puzzled over the trends of British policy during this period between wars, there were other international strains and stresses to cause them some disquiet. The Japanese were pushing in, establishing a Legation and encouraging

¹ In 1931 the Afghans were rearming for purposes of internal security and yet accepted an invitation tendered to them by the British Government to send a representative to the Disarmament Conference. When asked the reason for this apparent inconsistency the Foreign Minister replied with delightful cynicism that if the Conference should happen to succeed there would be lots of arms going cheap, and a man on the spot might pick up a bargain or two!

² Discussed in Ch. XIII.

imports till the bazars of southern Afghanistan were filled with their shoddy merchandise. It was a powerful lever with which to persuade one's neighbours that they could not have things entirely their own way, and in 1936 a trade pact with Russia was signed on terms which provided for a fair exchange of goods, but barred the door to Russian political penetration in the guise of trade agencies. So far the Japanese had served a useful purpose, but the Afghan Government did not much care for a country which sold but did not buy, and which was so obviously using its foothold in Central Asia as a look-out post, though not a very efficient one, on events across the Oxus. Still, the rising sun of Japan was showing above the Far Eastern horizon, it seemed likely that before long the hegemony of Eastern Asia would have to be decided between the Russians and Japanese, and a Japanese Mission was a useful counterbalance in Kabul.

So also was a German Mission. German relations with Nadir Shah's Government had not been very happy, partly owing to certain financial difficulties and partly owing to the dilatoriness of the German Government in deciding what to do with the murderer of Nadir Shah's brother, the Afghan Minister in Berlin. By 1935, however, these difficulties had been resolved, the assassin had been hanged and the financial question liquidated.

As we have already noted, the Afghan Government was at this time looking for some power with no political interests in Central Asia to back their projects of development. They found the Germans ready and willing for the venture, as part of a programme of eastern expansion, and though German experts and propagandists were never able to penetrate Afghanistan as they did Persia, this was not for want of trying. In 1935 a German scientific expedition was permitted to explore the little-known valleys of Nuristan, in search so it was said of the original wheat, and in 1936 surveys for the establishment of an air route across Afghanistan to China were undertaken by representatives of the Lufthansa Company. A weekly service was opened in the following year, and, though it never got further than linking Berlin with Kabul, it had great propaganda value in a land-locked state eager for a direct outlet to Europe.

At the same time German engineers and other experts began to appear in the capital, German machinery and bridging material was in process of erection. The great engineering firm of

Siemens opened an agency in Kabul, and houses and furniture of hideous German design were increasingly in evidence. To pay for all this, Afghan products were finding markets in Europe through official German agency. The economic entente was profitable for both sides ; Germany was adding to her stocks of raw material, while the Afghans were finding the Germans to be competent traders, expert advisers, and willing hard-working servants.¹ Had the war not intervened, economic relations between Germany and Afghanistan might have grown even closer.

But the war did intervene and sadly upset Afghan progress and development, as it did everyone else's. The Government proclaimed neutrality and did their level best to maintain it. There was a brief outburst on the frontier, said to have been engineered by the Italians, which was quickly suppressed, and the Faqir of Ipi acted as a magnet to draw adventurous Germans and Italians down to his cave across the border. But the Afghans shot two of the Germans whom they caught making their way towards the frontier, and the strong hand of the Prime Minister on one side and of Sir George Cunningham, Governor of the North-West Frontier Province, on the other, ensured the peace of the tribal areas. Feuds were temporarily put aside and grievances forgotten under the shadow of a world conflict and the menace of possible aggression from across the northern frontiers. The Afghans figuratively buttoned their coats and turned their backs to the blast, crouching behind the frail shelter of their international frontiers and their proclaimed neutrality, and hoping that the whirlwind would pass them by.

On the whole the policy of neutrality was followed in the letter and the spirit, but it is one thing to be neutral and quite another to appear to be neutral in the eyes of either belligerent.²

¹ I once asked a prominent Afghan why he preferred the Germans to the British in business matters. 'It's like this,' he said. 'In his own country the Briton is a delightful, courteous host who does everything he can to make you feel at home, whereas the German is boorish, arrogant, and inhospitable. But when it comes to doing a job of work for you abroad, the German is willing, anxious to please, punctual, and hardworking, while the Briton doesn't appear to want to do business, magnifies the difficulties and doesn't seem anxious to please you or get your custom.'

² I noticed a good example of the difficulty in Washington in 1944, when members of the International Red Cross Committee paid America a visit. Their genuine impartiality seemed to everyone to indicate a very pro-Axis bias.

In Afghanistan there was a certain amount of pro-German sentiment springing not unnaturally from Afghan experiences of the past few years, to which might be added the deep impression of German efficiency, discipline, and power engendered in the minds of those Afghans who had attended the Olympic Games in 1936.¹ But all this was sentiment present in the minds of a certain number of Afghans, and sentiment it remained. The Afghan Government had by this time a firm control over the country and had not the slightest intention of translating this sentiment into policy or of breaking neutrality at the bidding of a foreign power. Even in the dark days of 1940 the King and his advisers faced the imminent prospect of the break-up of the British Empire, and having considered the situation reaffirmed their neutrality. It was a fine gesture at one of the darkest moments in British history.

The current of Anglo-Afghan affairs did not, however, continue to run with complete smoothness during the ensuing eighteen months of critical history. Neutrality is not an easy policy to follow, and the presence in Afghanistan of about 200 German and Italian nationals engaged in engineering and other forms of employment was a constant, if not very serious, cause of irritation. In the autumn of 1941 the entry of British and Russian forces into Persia cut off the last link connecting these Axis nationals with their own country, while at the same time the stoppage of imports from Europe prevented them from completing the installations of machinery and similar tasks on which they were engaged. Their removal was obviously advisable, though in fact their power for evil among a people so suspicious of all foreign propaganda as the Afghans was negligible. It would have been easier and perhaps wiser to have allowed this removal to take place gradually, rather than to run the risk of inflaming Afghan sentiment at so critical a period of the war by insisting on too palpable an infringement of their neutrality. The British and Russian Governments, however, decided that they could not afford to give the Germans opportunity for further intrigue, and in the autumn of 1941 presented simultaneous requests for the removal of all Axis nationals except the diplomatic missions.²

¹ H.R.H. Sardar Shah Mahmud, the present Prime Minister, was among them.

² Who were, as a matter of fact, the main sources and focus of propaganda and intrigue.

These approaches, accompanied by a campaign of newspaper propaganda, which to the onlooker appeared to be as tactless as it was unnecessary,¹ led to a crisis. The Afghans took umbrage at this enforced infringement of their neutrality, and at the publicity given to the proposed violation of their traditional hospitality, and for a time feeling ran high.

The statesmanship of the Prime Minister saved the situation. He realized that whatever might be the outcome of the struggle in Europe, the recent turn of events in Asia had deprived the 'buffer state' of the principal function for which it existed. However little she might like it, Afghanistan must bow to the inevitable if she did not wish to witness the fulfilment of a sixty-year-old prophecy :

The Afghan is but grist in their mill, and the waters are moving it fast,
Let the stone be upper or nether, it grinds him to powder at last.²

But before accepting the Allies' 'advice' the Afghan Government took the precaution of summoning the National Assembly (Loe Jirga), which only meets in times of great emergency, to endorse their decision. After a heated debate common sense carried the day, but the Assembly took the opportunity to reaffirm a policy of rigid neutrality which they maintained up to the close of hostilities.

There is, however, no propaganda in the world to compare with that of success in the field of battle. The temptation to follow Mr. Pickwick's advice and 'shout with the largest mob' applies as much to warfare as it does to electioneering,³ and is particularly strong in the case of small nations. As the tide of battle turned and began in 1942-3 to flow strongly in favour of the Allied cause, so did the Afghan Government begin to feel less difficulty in choosing between distant friends and powerful neighbours. To this incentive was added a real gratitude to the Government of India which, at considerable cost to their own limited resources, did everything possible to ensure to Afghanistan sufficient supplies of consumption goods, such as petrol, piece goods, and sugar.

The exchange of diplomatic missions with China and America,

¹ See for instance *The Times* of 21 October 1941.

² Alfred Lyall, *The Amir's Soliloquy*, 1881.

³ See *Pickwick Papers*, Ch. XIII, for the occasion when this admirable piece of advice was given.

and the ready market in New York, as a substitute for London, for Afghan lambskins, were all factors tending by the end of the war to increase Afghan stability and place them in a better position to face a future which for some considerable time at any rate would contain no Germans. The natural tendency in the immediate post-war era was to turn to America to fill the gap in their economic field, while in the political field a settlement of the vexed Oxus frontier question with Russia, and the appointment of H.R.H. Sardar Shah Mahmud to succeed his elder brother as Prime Minister, were two events of importance.

But the whole of Asia was by this time affected by a realization that the British intended to leave India. It had been very difficult for the Afghans to envisage such a possibility. As India's nearest neighbour they had watched for many years her development under the strong, tolerant rule of Britain. They had looked down from their hills on to a great prosperous land guided by a few steadfast, inscrutable foreigners who spent their lives and ruined their constitutions in administering justice and keeping the peace all across India's sun-baked plains. But there was nothing strange about this. India always had been ruled by foreigners ; the Afghans themselves had ruled great parts of it, and the British certainly had the knack of maintaining the balance between the great warring creeds of Muslim and Hindu. Why then should they go, just at the moment when above all others their strong and steady hand was required to steer the ship amid all the baffling cross-currents of the post-war world ? It seemed so unnecessary.

But if they were going there was only one possible solution to the Indian problem, and that was a division of sovereignty between Muslim and Hindu. Such a solution, difficult though it might be, had some small chance of success ; no solution based on a Union of India could lead to anything but chaos and ruin.

It is interesting to recollect that this point of view was held in Kabul long before its validity was admitted in Britain or India. It was not based on any ill will for the Hindus, with whom the Afghans were quite prepared to live in harmony. It was based on a simple fact so clear to us who watched from the Afghan hills, so obscure to those who toiled for a just solution in Delhi and London. This fact was that, with all history behind them and all their fundamental differences of creed and way of life before

them, the great Muslim community of northern India would never submit to be ruled by a Hindu majority, no matter what form this rule might take. The Afghans understood this very clearly,¹ and knew that any attempt to impose unity on India must lead to disaster. It was, therefore, with no small measure of relief, that they learnt in 1947 of the belated decision to partition India.

¹ Many years before Pakistan had ever been mentioned as a possible solution to the Indian problem, a high official in Kabul put Afghan fears into words : ' We know what the Durand Line is, but what about the Gandhi line ? '

Chapter XIII

THE PROBLEM OF THE TRIBES

(continued)

I HAVE already referred briefly to the breakdown of the Curzon method of frontier control during the Third Afghan War, as marking the end of one of these periodic fluctuations in policy which are inevitable in all cases where the remedies proposed are palliatives rather than cures.¹

The breakdown came with dramatic swiftness. The outbreak of hostilities in May 1919 was accompanied by the publication in tribal territory of a *farman* (proclamation) by the Amir summoning the tribes to take part in *jihad* (holy war). For the first two weeks of the war British successes on the Khyber front steadied the tribal situation, except in the Khyber itself where on 19 May the militia had to be disbanded. On 24 May the Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province was able, in reviewing the general position on the frontier, to report that the political situation was improving every day. Three days later General Nadir Khan, who had been advancing slowly through Khost, invested the British outpost of Thal at the southern end of the Kurram Valley, thereby cutting off Parachinar and its garrison and threatening the stability of North Waziristan. Outposts at Spinwam and in the upper Tochi Valley were evacuated, the Wazirs in the North and South Waziristan Militia mutinied, Wana was abandoned and fell into Afghan hands, while in Zhob across the border of Baluchistan many desertions from the militia took place and Fort Sandeman was attacked. Within a few days British control of Waziristan had disappeared.

The effect on the whole tribal situation was marked, and was increased by Afghan action across the border, where in December 1919 General Nadir Khan was distributing black flags to tribesmen summoned to Jalalabad from the Indian side of the Durand Line, and telling them to prepare for war. Unrest continued throughout the greater part of the tribal area from Zhob to the

¹ Ch. X.

Khyber, and the figures of raids into the settled districts of the Frontier Province in 1919-20 rose to the alarming figure of 611, in the course of which 690 subjects of His Majesty were killed or wounded and 463 carried off to be held to ransom. Such a situation was intolerable and could not be allowed to continue.

It was not, however, very clear what the future policy should be. There were some who held that the Curzon 'close border' policy failed not because it was in itself faulty, but because when the crisis came the machinery of support from the regular garrisons in the rear was not put into motion, and the policy was in fact never carried out. It is difficult to say how far this is the case. The establishment of militia garrisons far out in tribal territory with no visible supports, and many miles of potentially hostile and dangerous country between them and the nearest regular troops, seems to give hostages to fortune. These militia outposts, pushed up the valleys stretching down from the Durand Line, were intended to support a very light civilian control, a control which might in time make its influence felt in the trans-border areas but which at the end of fifteen years since its inception carried in fact no weight whatever against the *farman* of an Afghan ruler backed by a very slight show of force. Nor does it seem likely that any force of regulars which could reasonably and quickly have been pushed up in support of the militia from India would have turned the scale in our favour. The only way to prevent the swift blaze of revolt from spreading along the frontier is never to allow it to burst into flame at all. This the militia could not do. They were not intended to meet such a crisis, and in fact throughout Waziristan the flame caught them and burnt them up, long before the steadying influence of regular forces could have quenched it.

When in the autumn of 1919 the British Government of India were able to turn their attention to the question of future policy and action on the frontier, their first objective was obviously to make their influence once more felt in the areas in which unrest had been most pronounced. A forward movement into Waziristan in the winter of 1919 resulted, after some heavy fighting, in the occupation of Kaniguram in the heart of the Mahsud country in March 1920. A few months later the tribes of Waziristan were informed that the Government intended to occupy central posts in their country and to control them by means of roads.

It was not, however, till 1922 that a policy was formulated, after a Frontier Enquiry Commission had toured the North-West Province. Its main objective was defined in the following spring by the Foreign Secretary in a speech defending his policy before the Assembly. After discussing the 'forward policy', which he described as being 'in these days of acutest financial stringency' a mere counsel of perfection, and the 'close border policy', which he denounced as 'a policy of negation and nothing more', leaving the tribesmen 'free in their devil's kitchen of mischief to brew incalculable trouble for us', Sir Denys Bray described the 'Government policy'.

The crux in Waziristan [he said] is not the Wazirs . . . but the Mahsuds, who live in the strategical heart of Waziristan, separated from Afghanistan by the Wazirs, and separated from our British districts by the Bhattanis. In their inaccessibility lies their strength. . . . Though Government are determined to bring Mahsud country under control, it is not on the military occupation of Mahsud country that their policy is based. On the contrary, the military occupation of Mahsud country will shortly cease; to be replaced partly by internal control through Scouts and Khassadars,¹ and partly by the domination of Mahsud country from two posts² on the edge of, but outside the Mahsud country itself, held in force and linked together by a connecting road. . . . Henceforth the Mahsuds will be robbed of much of their inaccessibility in which lay their strength. . . . The policy of Government in Waziristan is therefore the control of Waziristan—through a road system. . . .³

This then was the new policy, designed originally to meet the requirements of the situation in Waziristan, where the inaccessibility of the tribesmen rendered them less susceptible to external influence than elsewhere along the frontier. But gradually under the name of the 'modified forward policy' the theory of peaceful penetration of the tribal areas, of the gradual extension of control over the tribes lying between the administered border and the Durand Line, was extended to cover the whole frontier from the Gumal River to the Malakand Pass.

As a theory it was unimpeachable. It held the balance between

¹ Scouts was the new name for the re-formed militias. Khassadars were tribal police responsible for the general safety of the roads running through the areas of their respective tribes.

² Razmak and Wana.

³ Speech before the Legislative Assembly, 5 March 1923.

the Chinese-Wall policy of a static frontier, and the dangerous, costly alternative of an immediate advance to the Durand Line. It implied that, as our 'peaceful penetration' gradually impinged on the way of life of the tribes, there would be a constant stirring and bubbling in the tribal cauldron, but that we should never stir so strongly that the devil's brew of tribal unrest would boil over into widespread revolt as it had done in 1897. And in the far distance it held out a prospect of tribal pacification and disarmament right up to the Durand Line, of a day when men might 'ride the border side, and brethren meet at every turn', and the beautiful valleys of Tirah and the wooded slopes of Shui Dar might be the home of a prosperous, happy, peaceful people.

But such a day was far distant, and such a task required the whole-hearted co-operation of the Afghan Government, for it would be of no avail for the British to extend their control up to the Line, if on arrival they were to find no similar control on the other side of the frontier. The 'modified forward policy' required for its fulfilment a similar penetration by the Afghan Government to a point where they could ensure the peace of the Afghan side of the border; it also required that the time-honoured policy of Afghan interference on the Indian side of the Durand Line should henceforth cease.

Before 1919 it would have been quite useless to attempt to inculcate such a spirit of co-operation into the Afghan Government. But when with the Treaty of Rawalpindi the Afghans assumed the full responsibilities of a sovereign state, and with the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921 undertook to respect the independence and the frontiers of India, it became possible to assume, in theory at any rate, that the frontiers of India and Afghanistan would be regulated and governed by the general principles of international law. It was essential to make such an assumption in order to have some basis on which to work, and some goal at which to aim, but it was only too obvious from the very earliest approaches to the subject that the goal was far distant, and that on the Indo-Afghan boundary for many years to come neither side would be able fully to implement the canons of international law.

We find some suggestion of the difficulty of the situation in the wording of the Treaty itself. Article eleven stipulates that each of the High Contracting Parties should 'inform the other in

future of any military operations of major importance, which may appear necessary for the maintenance of order among the frontier tribes residing within their respective spheres before the commencement of such operations'. Furthermore, attached to the Treaty there is a letter from the British representative to the Afghan Foreign Minister which runs as follows :

As the conditions of the frontier tribes of the two Governments are of interest to the Government of Afghanistan, I inform you that the British Government entertains feelings of goodwill towards all frontier tribes, and has every intention of treating them generously, provided they abstain from outrages against the inhabitants of India. I hope that this letter will cause you satisfaction.¹

Whether it caused satisfaction or not, there is no doubt that the Treaty would not have been signed without some such reference to the actual as opposed to the theoretical situation. At the same time, the admission of Afghan interests in the welfare of the tribes on the Indian side of the Durand Line gave as it were a certain legal basis to Afghan interference across the line. For the next twenty-six years the British Government's main objective in frontier policy was to induce the Afghan Government to recognize the illegality of action, which they themselves had by implication sanctioned.

From the very outset of the establishment in 1922 of normal diplomatic relations between the two countries, it was obvious that the task of persuading the Afghan Government to recognize the status of the Durand Line as an international boundary was going to be long and difficult. The aftermath of the Third Afghan War was, as we have seen, a great increase of lawlessness in the frontier areas, leading to the introduction of a forward policy on the part of the Government of India. This in turn led to an increase in tension among the tribes and to raids and reprisals in various forms, many of which took place from bases in Afghanistan, and were perpetrated by Afghan subjects. In other cases tribesmen from the Indian side of the border, outlawed for murder or some such dire offence, took refuge across the line and lay low in the security of Afghan territory. Such things had been going on along this restless frontier for generations. The temptation to descend from the barren frontier hills, to deprive the fat

¹ Letter IV attached to the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921. *Aitchison's Treaties*, Vol. XIII.

Hindu merchant of his goods, and at times of his life, and then to return to the safe harbourage of Afghanistan was much too great to be resisted by the hungry tribesmen. It had never been possible for the Government of India to do anything about it so long as the Amir refused diplomatic intercourse and Kabul remained a forbidden city behind its curtain of hills and fanaticisms. But after the establishment early in 1922 of a British diplomatic mission at the Court of the Amir, it became possible to begin the education of the Afghan Government in the canons of international comity, and to bring home to the Amir that sovereignty carried with it responsibilities as well as privileges.

Amanullah and his advisers were not apt pupils. They had no intention whatever of relinquishing the 'prickly hedge' policy which involved the maintenance of strong Afghan influence among the tribes on both sides of the border, nor did they propose to weaken this influence by any such pro-British action as arresting outlaws or controlling raiding gangs who were operating from within their borders. By the autumn of 1923 the position was growing intolerable. Only relentless pressure accompanied by infinite patience saved the complete breakdown of relations. The action taken by the Afghans early in 1924 to comply with British demands was sufficient to remove the causes of complaint, but its effects on the relations of the tribes with the Amir, as we have noted, were unfortunate, and were responsible at least in part for the Khost rebellion of 1924.¹

The whole question continued to rankle in Amanullah's mind. He saw in the 'forward policy' a continuation of that slow pressure which had marked the British advance through India, till it had driven his predecessor Sher Ali from his throne and twenty years later had caused the whole frontier to flare up in revolt. It was a frightening thing, this slow, relentless advance into areas which no Afghan had ever looked on as forming part of India, areas peopled with men of his own blood and race and religion, who turned to him in their need for help against the infidel and the oppressor.

He did what he could. He continued the regular system of payments to tribesmen across the border who were hostile to Britain, he maintained what almost amounted to a militia in Waziristan, and he protested strongly and repeatedly against the

¹ Pt. II, Ch. XI (2).

forward policy through the press in Afghanistan and his Minister in London.¹ When these protests had no effect he took the matter up himself in London in 1928, where in reply to his remarks the Secretary of State, Sir Austen Chamberlain, made the unequivocal statement that he could only discuss the question of British policy towards the tribesmen on the clear understanding that the frontier *was* the frontier, and that these so-called independent tribes were within our frontier and subjects of the King Emperor. This was of course the crux of the whole matter, but before Amanullah and his advisers had time to digest the full implication of this pregnant sentence they were swept into oblivion.

With the accession of King Nadir Shah the whole problem presented itself in a fashion more compatible with normal international intercourse. Although by no means indifferent to the fate of his fellow countrymen on the Indian side of the border, the new King had, as we have seen, a far more balanced and wider outlook on international affairs than his predecessors, and had every intention of carrying out his obligations as a peaceful neighbour, so far as it was possible.

But how far was it possible? This was the question which vexed the relations of the two Governments throughout the 1930s, and caused the British representative in Afghanistan to be looked on in Delhi as more Afghan than the Afghans and in Kabul as an unsympathetic advocate of imperial expansion. It was in fact extremely difficult to say just how far the Kabul Government could go to co-operate in the control of the frontier areas, and how far the British Government were justified in prosecuting a policy on the frontier, which might at any time result in an upheaval endangering the stability of the buffer state.

In certain respects the new régime showed a marked improvement in its attitude to these problems. A better understanding of, though not necessarily agreement with, the objects and aims of British policy, coupled with a realization of the growing power of the air arm, soon convinced Nadir Shah and his advisers that

¹ For instance the *Aman-i-Afghan*, a prominent Kabul paper, had an intemperate article criticizing the 'forward policy' in its issue of July 1926. In May of the following year the Afghan Minister presented a memorandum to the Foreign Office protesting against the forward policy, in pursuit of which it was alleged that the Government of India had been devoting particular attention to the frontiers of Afghanistan, in order to rouse the independent Afghan tribes against the Afghan Government.

the maintenance of the 'prickly hedge' of tribal defence against possible aggression from India was no longer either necessary or useful, and was in fact more of a danger than a safeguard. Moreover, it was hardly in keeping with the role of a civilized State to permit within its boundaries many thousands of well-armed and potentially hostile savages who might at any time menace its stability and arrest its progress.

The realization of this fact was a notable advance, but the removal of the tribal menace was a very formidable undertaking. It was much easier to understand this in Kabul, where the tribes came up to the very gates of the capital on one side and where on the other only a low ridge of hills separated the King and his Government from the notoriously inflammable Koh-i-Daman Valley, than in Delhi where in no conceivable circumstances could the King Emperor's Government have been jeopardized by a rising of Pathan tribes. The proximity of the tribes to all the main centres of commerce and to the principal highways of southern and eastern Afghanistan, and their comparative strength in relation to the military forces of the country, had all to be taken into very careful consideration by the Afghan rulers when estimating the measures they could afford to take to extend their influence and control in the tribal areas abutting on the frontier.

Nor could they venture to accede as fully as was compatible with their international obligations to the oft-repeated requests of the Government of India to drop all connexion with the tribes on the Indian side of the line. For the Afghan rulers, who understood the tribes so much better than even the foremost British political officer, knew that, no matter what assurances the Government of India might give, they had not in fact the control over the frontier areas sufficient for them to guarantee immunity to Afghanistan from attacks by Indian tribesmen.

Nadir Shah himself had discovered in 1929 how easy it was for an Afghan leader who held out promises of loot to attract to his standards Wazir and Mahsud tribesmen, despite all warnings and protests from the Government of India. Similarly in 1933, when tribal opinion was running strongly against the King and his frontier policy, these same fickle tribesmen crossed the Durand Line and, in spite of all efforts on the part of the Government of India, laid siege to Matun, the capital of the Afghan Province of Khost. Only when they had been soundly beaten in the field

by the King's brother, H.R.H. Sardar Shah Mahmud, did they heed the admonitions of the British frontier authorities and return to their homes. Again in 1938 the incident of the Shami Pir, though demonstrating not only the goodwill of the Government of India but also a somewhat increased mastery of the tribal situation, gravely shook Afghan belief in the efficiency of the frontier administration and in the power of the Government of India to practise the tribal control they so frequently preached to others. The story is worth repeating.

Sa'id-al-Kailani, the Shami Pir, belonged to one of the main branches of the family of Shaikh Abdu'l-Qadir Jilani, which claims direct descent from the prophet Muhammad. He was a relative of the ex-King's consort, and had been sent from Syria by the Amanullah party to raise the tribes of Waziristan against King Zahir Shah. He made his way through India in the spring of 1938 and managed to elude the attention of the authorities until he reached Waziristan, where he was already known to and revered by the inhabitants. At this point the Afghan Government got wind of his presence, and sent repeated warnings to India that he was bent on mischief. These warnings were at first disregarded, but at length in the middle of June the Indian frontier authorities sent for the Pir and warned him that he was under suspicion. This warning caused the Pir to resolve on immediate action. On 15 June from the inaccessible principal town of Mahsud country, Kaniguram, he issued a proclamation denouncing King Zahir Shah as a usurper, and declaring his intention to restore Amanullah to his rightful throne. Large numbers of Mahsuds and Wazirs flocked to his standards, and at the head of a considerable *lashkar* (tribal army) he started for the frontier. For four days the position was critical. In the north the Faqir of Ipi still held the field, to the west across the frontier the moribund Ghilzai insurrection only required a leader to put fresh life into the rebels. Such a leader was forthcoming in the Shami Pir, and had he crossed the frontier and joined forces with the Ghilzais, all Katawaz would have adhered to his cause and within a week Ghazni might have fallen.

But the Indian frontier authorities, though slow to appreciate the danger, were quick to meet it. Throughout Waziristan meetings were held warning the tribes against joining the Pir, leaflets were distributed in remote localities by air, and constant

watch was kept by the Royal Air Force on the movements of the *lashkar* in its march to the frontier. On the third day a reaction began to set in. Propaganda and air activity did their work, and though a portion of the *lashkar* crossed the frontier and exchanged shots with Afghan outposts, the movement faltered, the main body dispersed, and the Pir was persuaded without much difficulty to meet the British frontier authorities. A sum of £20,000 was the price offered him to discontinue his activities and quit the country. He accepted and was removed from India by air. It was a very narrow escape from a disaster of the first magnitude, and it did nothing to strengthen the British case for the discontinuance of Afghan influence and intervention across the Durand Line.

During all this time the forward policy was passing through its various stages. At first it prospered. After their initial resistance the tribes of Waziristan submitted without much difficulty to a system of control which interfered hardly at all with their daily lives, while Khassadars' pay and work on the new roads proved a timely source of income. By 1929 the forward policy was at its zenith, and raiding on the Waziristan border had practically ceased. But the tide of success was turning. In the following year that curious offspring of the Hindu-dominated Congress of India, the Red Shirts of the Frontier Province, stirred the ever-restless trans-frontier men to activity. A rising in Waziristan demonstrated how tenuous was our control and how immovable were our garrisons in times of stress. For a few weeks the controllers became the besieged and all movements on the roads were brought to a standstill.¹ Further north the Afridis invaded the settled districts and seriously threatened Peshawar. This phase passed, to be succeeded by the abortive attempt to secure peaceful penetration into Tirah, and the stubborn resistance offered by the Mohmands to less peaceful penetration of their mountain fastnesses. In Waziristan the Faqir of Ipi embarked on his career of resistance to British domination, which was to cost us many valuable lives and a deal of money, while at the same time his intriguing on both sides of the border proved a constant source of irritation to our relations with the Afghan Government. There was

¹ As Deputy Commissioner of Dera Ismail Khan at this time, I remember acting as the sole means of communication between the militia post of Jandola and the headquarter camp at Razmak.

obviously something wrong with the 'modified forward policy', and by 1939 serious consideration was being given to the advisability of replacing the regular garrison of Razmak by something less flat-footed and provocative to the tribesmen. But administrative difficulties in the way of such a move were great, and in deference to military opinion a withdrawal from Razmak was deferred to a more favourable opportunity.

But this discussion brought to the fore a question which had long exercised the minds of those charged with the administration of frontier affairs. Was the frontier problem primarily a civil or a military responsibility? In early days it had certainly been considered a problem of civil administration, and indeed the Panjab Frontier Force, which had been raised in the middle of the previous century to guard the frontier, was in the first instance organized 'for Police and General Purposes . . . under the orders of the Agent to the Governor-General on the North-West Frontier'.¹ As time went on, however, the tendency increased to militarize the frontier administration and to look on the frontier problem as primarily a military problem. This was particularly the case after the First World War when the implementation of the forward policy required a considerable increase in military control of the advanced positions in the tribal areas. It was augmented by the forceful personality of some of the British war leaders, who held high posts in the military hierarchy of India during this period, and by the curious anomaly whereby the Viceroy was his own Foreign Minister. It was perhaps reasonable that the Viceroy should hold the portfolio of foreign affairs in former days, when the great machine of India still moved forward at a dignified and leisurely pace and there was opportunity to cast an eye on to and beyond her frontiers. But it was quite impossible for any man adequately to supervise the increasing complications of international and frontier affairs in the period between the wars, while at the same time he steered the ship of state through all the storms and perils of the non-co-operation and similar movements which were then convulsing the body politic of India. The result was to throw an unfair burden on the Foreign Secretary, who found himself in effect carrying the responsibilities of a most important office without having either

¹ G.G.O. Foreign Department, No. 2457 dated 14 December 1846, reproduced in the *History of the Guides*, Ch. I, p. 4.

the authority or the prestige of membership of the Viceroy's Council ¹ to support him, while in all matters of external policy, where civil and military interests might clash, the military point of view was liable to receive undue preference.

This in itself was unfortunate, since the military point of view is very liable at times to concentrate on military interests, as the following illustration will show. On one occasion a high military official in Delhi gave a lecture to a select audience on the strategic situation of Afghanistan, and pressed home with vigour and wealth of language the paramount importance of the buffer state and the perils which beset it. His audience left the lecture room forcibly impressed with the value to the peace of Asia of a strong and friendly Afghanistan, and determined to do all in their power to further the cause of Afghan stability. Next day the Foreign Secretary, who had attended the lecture, happened to meet the speaker of the day before in the corridors of the Secretariat. The latter had under his arm a file, in which the Foreign Secretary had recorded a minute deprecating a certain move of troops on the frontier as likely to disturb the equanimity and possibly affect the stability of the Afghan Government. 'My boy,' said yesterday's champion of the buffer state, 'what we do within our own borders is no concern of Afghanistan. If these troops move to ——— they stay there. They are not going to be jerked about like a puppy dog on the end of a string by any of your damned Politicals.'²

In this little episode we find as it were the distilled essence of the vexed frontier problem. It was not that the men who dealt with it were slow-witted, far from it. They were as able and clear-headed a body as you could wish. But the whole business was so complicated, the minor problem of tribal control loomed so very large in the foreground, and the major problem of the stability of the buffer state receded and was often forgotten in the stress of tribal recalcitrance and the immediate requirements of the local situation.

People have likened this problem to the French position in Morocco, and have advocated a military administration and governorship on the lines so successfully followed by Marshal

¹ The equivalent of Cabinet rank in Britain.

² Politicals. A terse and slightly opprobrious name for members of the Foreign and Political Department.

Lyautey. But the problem of India's north-west frontier was far more complicated than this and could not be dealt with on the straightforward simple lines adopted by the great French soldier-statesman. It was in fact hardly a military problem at all, though it often seemed like one, and its duality was both baffling and irritating to the straightforward reasoning of the military mind.

The British did not solve the problem of the tribes, and when in August 1947 they handed over control of India's north-western defences to the untried Government of Pakistan, they handed over likewise a fluid, difficult situation, fraught with much danger to the future of India.

But this fact, as I have tried to point out, was not the fault of the British rulers of India. If they failed to solve the problem of India's frontier, they failed because of their strength and of their integrity of purpose. A nation less imbued with a sense of justice would have pushed forward to the Hindu Kush and sought to incorporate the Pathan nation within the Empire of India; a weaker nation would have retreated to the Indus and abandoned the rich lands of the frontier province to their fate. The British did neither. They chose the more difficult middle path and for years maintained equilibrium between two conflicting policies, never losing sight amid all the strains and stresses, the irritations and frustrations of the immediate frontier problem, of the overriding necessity to keep the buffer state intact and to maintain the integrity of the Hindu Kush.

Had fate so willed it, I have no doubt that in the end the British would have solved the frontier problem. It would have taken a long time before the steady pressure of civilization, operating from both sides of the border, so altered the economic condition and the mental outlook of the frontier tribes that they discarded their weapons, their blood feuds, and their tribal customs for a more settled and peaceful way of life. But it could have been done, and it would have been done in the end by the British and the Afghans working each in their own fashion with the common aim of bringing peace and security to an area which has known neither peace nor security for maybe a thousand years.

Though fate has not allowed us to complete the task we began at the end of the eighteenth century, we are I think justified, as we look back on what we did and on the men who did it, in

believing that both of these will receive honourable mention at the bar of history.

At a time when the jackals are yapping at the heels of the tired old British lion, when 'imperialism' is a term of disgrace, and a strange new world is ushering in 'the era of the common man', let us look back for a moment to say good-bye to a company of 'uncommon men' who moulded the policy and held the frontiers of India for close on 150 years, from the days when Lord Wellesley, 'the little Marquis', first sought to curb Afghan power, to the day when the British handed over control not because they had to but because they thought it right. Their day has passed and their work will be soon forgotten, but they were, with very few exceptions, a goodly company who carried out a delicate, difficult, and often hazardous task as well as any men could have done, who lived hard and sometimes died hard, who were patient, firm, ruthless, or kindly as occasion warranted, and who were above all rulers undeterred by criticism and false report. They made their mistakes and they often disagreed, not only with their friends the enemy, if one may call them so, but also with their Government and among themselves. For there were among them men of strong character and strong will, who spent their lives dealing with the Pathans and wrestling with the many local problems of frontier control, and who in consequence sometimes got so near to the picture that they could not see the wider perspective. And there were others, who wearied of the uninspired processes of bureaucratic control and chafed at the lack of vision which so often hampered and even destroyed their work. But in spite of all this their work went on, slowly but with a definite aim and to a foreseen goal. I have tried to describe a little of it in this book, and in doing so have mentioned the names of one or two members of their company. But there were many others, a few distinguished and remembered, the great majority unknown and forgotten. But all of them, soldiers and civilians, engineers, doctors, policemen, and the rest played their part in a great game and with a great responsibility. For nowhere else perhaps in the world are the hazards greater or the responsibility of the individual more vital than in the country which stretches north-westwards from the Indus River to the Mountains of the Hindu Kush.

Their part in the great drama of Central Asia is finished and the players have left the stage. Perhaps some day in the records

of history they will somewhere be remembered among that honourable company of whom it has been written :

These in the day when Heaven was falling
The hour when Earth's foundation fled,
Followed their mercenary calling
And took their wages and are dead.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended,
They stood and earth's foundations stay ;
What God abandoned these defended
And saved the sum of things for pay.¹

¹ A. E. Housman, *Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries*.

Part III

THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

Chapter I

THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

ON 15 August 1947 direct British control over India came to an end. For thirty years British politicians had striven with integrity and zeal to bring about a transfer of power from British to Indian shoulders in such a manner that in due course the sovereignty over a unified India should pass to the Indian people without friction and without discord. A united India was the objective, an India which either within or without the British Commonwealth could assume those great responsibilities which the British had inherited from the Moguls and had consolidated in one Empire under the Crown of Britain.

It is not my purpose here to consider why this objective was not achieved, nor why in the end the only solution found practicable, the partition of India, should have led at the outset to an orgy of discord and massacre all across the once peaceful plains of the Panjab and over the hills into the lovely vale of Kashmir. Such an inquiry would be outside the scope of this narrative; and in any case the events are still too close upon us to permit of unbiased appraisement. They must await the judgement of history.

It is sufficient for my purpose to record that these things did happen, and that when they happened the whole fabric of the Indian State was torn and shaken to its foundations. The great physical and moral power, which had first established and then supported the frontiers of Afghanistan and India on the line of the Oxus and the Hindu Kush, was to a large extent weakened and withdrawn. It will not be entirely withdrawn so long as Pakistan remains in the Commonwealth, and even if she were to sever this connexion some link might still be forged to enable the British to maintain their long and abiding interest in the integrity of India's frontiers. But this interest can no longer be direct. The British Government can watch the situation from its outposts in Kabul, Meshed, and Tehran, and tender advice and if necessary offer support to the new régime. And for a time British officials with the Pakistan Government will maintain

at least a façade of the old frontier control. But they will disappear and with their disappearance will go likewise the framework of British rule, gradually losing its characteristics and changing its shape as a generation arises which never knew the British as rulers of their country. More and more will India and Pakistan revert to an indigenous type of Government and to oriental methods of conducting affairs.

Such a change may soon take place, or it may be that British influence will remain for many years to come to inform the rulers of India and Pakistan. In either case it is not my intention to devote these last chapters of the story of the Hindu Kush to any rash estimates or prophecies of what is likely in the near future to be the policy or the fate of these two raw new states which have emerged from the deliberations of the best brains in Britain and India in the years between the wars. They may retain their present form, or on the other hand the storms and stresses which have accompanied their birth may have so weakened their structure that it will before long be subject to further internal upheavals and changes. It is impossible to say at present.

But it would I think be of interest, and perhaps of value, to conclude the story of the Hindu Kush by looking back across the pages of history, to see if we can discern any pattern which might in some way link together the many chapters of this story and give them a sequence and a meaning. Such a pattern is, I believe, discernible, and if we can trace it with sufficient clearness so that the pieces fall into some regular shape, we might go on then to consider what has caused this pattern and whether these causes are still operative, so that the past becomes a guide to the future.

I will begin my search by considering first the British part in this long story, and the foundations on which their rule was based. There have been many conceptions at home and abroad of how we ruled India, and very few of them have been correct. In particular the Americans, clinging desperately to that great canon of their democratic creed, the detestation and fear of all forms of autocracy, have sought from their journalists and other superficially informed persons, confirmation of their assumption that British treatment of Indians resembled closely the treatment accorded to the negro slaves in the Southern States in the days

before 1865.¹ Not only citizens of the U.S.A. but many people much nearer home have looked on our rule in India as a terrible crime and outrage against humanity. It has rarely been described from the other side, so let me attempt a slight sketch of what was in fact its most important aspect.

It is well to remember that British rule was not founded on coercion or fear. Nor did it depend on a centralized administration governing in bureaucratic isolation from one or other of the great urban centres. If the central and provincial governments had all been consigned to simultaneous oblivion, India would still have carried on, for the stability of India depended not on its cities, but on its vast rural population, its landowners, and its peasants, and on the manner in which they were governed. So let us consider for a moment what type of rule this was.

The District was the smallest administrative unit in the country and at the head of it was the Deputy Commissioner. He was a very lonely man, as all men are lonely who are set under authority. He had rarely more and often less than half a dozen British officials to help him to rule many thousands of square miles of country and many tens of thousands of hard-working, patient, but often fanatical people. His work never ended: he was liable to have to take charge at any time of day or night of any type of situation, knowing that if he was successful his success would be received in silence and without much gratitude, and if he failed the jackals would be around his heels. He had always to be accessible and patient and courteous; to know all the men who mattered, the great landowner, the rich merchant, the rising barrister, and to treat them all alike, showing favour to none and friendliness to all save when some misdemeanour required the stern voice of authority. His work was endless, in court and in office, and yet he had to find time to go out into the district, and visit outlying villages, riding by unfrequented paths, and talk to the folk as he met them and listen to their troubles and if possible put them right. He never stopped working and he never stopped

¹ This impression derives from conversations during a period of 2½ years' residence in America with many well-disposed citizens of the U.S.A. It was very rare to find anyone to appreciate the remark of a candid gentleman who wrote in one of the leading newspapers: 'We think that in spite of the fact that we cannot even successfully manage the territory of Puerto Rico—our slum in the Caribbean—we have nevertheless a God-given right to advise the British . . . on how to manage their colonies. . . .' *Washington Post*, November 1944.

learning. His authority rested on his own ability and tact, and on the courtesy, loyalty, and goodwill which he received from the vast majority of those in whose service he laboured.

Such in briefest outline was the task of many a civil administrator in India under British rule. It was, as I have said, a lonely life and a life of great responsibility. The majority of the administrators accepted the position without question; the task of ruling others in a kindly paternal way was one for which the British were admirably fitted by temperament and by training, and the administration had to be carried on. There was no profit in inquiring further by what right and by what power we ruled India.

But there were some who though they accepted the position never ceased altogether to find it strange. The solitary Englishman¹ ruling thousands of foreigners of different race and creed, whose language he understood often with difficulty and whose customs and way of life were largely alien to his own, this was a strange phenomenon indeed, and stranger still in that he ruled with little or no show of force behind him, and with the willing acquiescence of the vast majority of his 'subjects'. Much could be accounted for no doubt by the physical, mental, and moral training of the young Englishmen before ever they set about their task, and much too might be put down to the force of tradition which surrounds a well-established rule. But unless one was prepared to accept an innate 'racial superiority', a superiority due to some inborn quality of race unconnected with education or training,² it was not easy to give a wholly satisfactory answer to the insistent question: 'What is the reason for the willing submission of the vast majority of Indians to close on two centuries of British rule?' Let us see whether history can provide us with a reply.

I have referred in an earlier chapter³ to a certain cycle of historical sequence which is manifest throughout the story of the Hindu Kush. This cycle started no doubt in prehistoric times. It is probable that the very earliest movements of which

¹ Under which title I include Scotch, Irish, and Welshmen. My nationalist fellow countrymen must forgive me. Britisher, British man, or even Briton won't quite do in this context.

² For an analysis of the fallacy of racial superiority see *A Study of History*, Vol. I, by Dr. Arnold Toynbee.

³ Pt. I, Ch. II.

we are aware, the entry of the first Indo-European races (the Aryans) into India, which may have occurred as long ago as 1200 B.C., belongs to this cycle. The conquest of the Indus Valley and possibly of the western Panjab by the Persians in the sixth century B.C. may belong also to the same cycle, though the Persian irruptions into northern India, which took place at intervals up to the middle of the eighteenth century, approached India by outflanking and not by crossing the Hindu Kush.

In the second century B.C., however, we find in the Greek invasion of India from across the Hindu Kush and in the establishment of Greek rule in India, the prototype of the invasions which were to be repeated at intervals during the succeeding centuries. When the invasion of India took place in the first quarter of the second century B.C., the Greek Kingdom of Bactria had been independent of the Seleucid Empire for perhaps nearly half a century. From the capital of Bactria, Balkh, the Greek rulers included in their kingdom Farghana, Samarqand, and Merv, as well as parts of eastern Iran, and the Paropamisadae just south of the Hindu Kush. In about 184 B.C. the Greeks under Demetrius crossed the Hindu Kush in force, and proceeded to the conquest of northern India. In the next few years they conquered all the Panjab and Sind, and reached Patna on the east and Ujjain in the centre of India. 'For a few brief years Demetrius was lord of a realm which in mere size probably surpassed that of the first Seleucus; he ruled from the Jaxartes to the Gulf of Cambaye, from the Persian desert to the middle Ganges.'¹

This was a very remarkable feat, more especially since the Greek element in the invading forces cannot have been very large. But they came at an opportune moment, when the break-up of the Maurya Empire had left northern India confused and masterless. They seem to have encountered but little opposition, and to have established themselves without difficulty as rulers of a docile people, who welcomed the stability and the tolerance of their new masters. But the Empire of Demetrius did not last long. As a direct consequence of his victories the centre of interest of his dominions shifted from Bactria into India,² where he had established his capital at Taxila, and his control over his dominions north of the Hindu Kush weakened. In 168 B.C.

¹ W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Ch. IV, p. 155.

² *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I, Ch. XVII, p. 446.

he had to return hastily to Bactria to meet a rebellion led by a representative of the Seleucid Empire, Eucratides, leaving his general Menander in charge of the northern portion of the Greek dominions in India, the country to the south of Mathura (Muttra) having been abandoned.

The Greek Kingdom in India, founded by Demetrius and consolidated by Menander, lasted till well into the first century B.C. At its zenith under Menander the method of government of a small ruling class of foreigners over the people of northern India bears a strong resemblance to a similar rule by Europeans in India some two thousand years later. Dr. Tarn, the greatest living authority on this period, has given a vivid picture of what was probably the framework of Greek rule. The country was divided into satrapies, corresponding perhaps to the divisions into which the provinces of British-India were divided at a later date. Each satrapy would contain a small nucleus of Greek officials for purposes of administration and revenue, and the General (or Governor) of the satrapy would have at his disposal a few troops and a strong-point here and there held by native soldiers from some distant province. The Kingdom was held together by the ruler, his mixed army, and his Greek (or possibly mixed) bureaucracy, but its stability 'must have largely depended on the co-operation of friendly native elements, and the existing native organization must often have been retained unaltered. Only one vassal King is actually known, the ruler of Mathura, though there must have been others. . . .'¹ It does not require a very great stretch of imagination to picture a Greek 'Deputy Commissioner',² the head of some sub-division of a satrapy, performing the same functions, facing the same responsibilities, and relying on the same goodwill as did his British successor of some twenty centuries later.

But the Greeks could not replenish their stock as the British could, nor were they able for long to rely on support from their homeland. They were cut off from Europe first by the Parthian invasions of Persia, and then from Bactria by the Saka penetration up the Indus Valley to Gandhara (Peshawar) and Kophene (Kabul). By the beginning of the first century B.C. the Greeks

¹ W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Ch. VI, p. 258.

² They were known as 'meridarchs' or governors of fractions, op. cit., Ch. VI, p. 242.

in India were becoming Indianized,¹ and were presumably losing many of their salient Greek characteristics.

In the meantime their hold on the vital 'March-State' of Bactria was relaxing. The dissipation of strength caused by their Indian venture, and internecine strife, so weakened the Greek Empire of Demetrius north of the Hindu Kush that, somewhere between 141 and 128 B.C., Greek rule vanished from this area.² It was overwhelmed by a southward movement first of the Sakas and then of the great Yue-chi confederation whose most powerful section, the Kushans, followed the Greek example in establishing themselves in Bactria before crossing the Hindu Kush and descending to the conquest of northern India.³

Thus it is that, as we study the records of Indian history, we find that from the Greek period onward there emerges a standard pattern of invasion of north-western India, followed by conquest, dominion, and gradual decay of the conquering race. The pattern is not of course entirely regular. The Kushans seem to have copied the Greeks in most particulars, and the great Empire, which Kanishka ruled from Peshawar in about the first century A.D., corresponds more or less to the short-lived Greek Empire, of Demetrius. The record becomes rather shadowy about this time, but the Kushan invasion of India seems to have been followed by a transfer of the seat of Government from the north to the south of the Hindu Kush and a consequent weakening in the defences of the March-State. Kushan rule, however, continued in northern India for another 300 years till finally extinguished by the invasions of the Ephthalites or White Huns in the fifth century A.D.

This brings us nearly to the period of the Arab invasions of Central Asia, when the clash between the rising faith of Islam and the 'barbarians' of Transoxiana gave India for a period respite from invasion. But in the eleventh century the cycle was resumed, though after a slightly different pattern, by the great raids of Mahmud of Ghazni followed by the establishment of one foreign dynasty after another on the throne of Delhi. Finally the conquest of northern India in 1526 by the Barlas Turk Babur, and the establishment of the Mogul Empire, reproduced the full

¹ Op. cit., Ch. IX, p. 390.

² Op. cit., Ch. VII, p. 274.

³ *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I, Ch. XXIII, p. 583.

cycle. Again we find the same pattern, as the great Turkish leader crossed the Hindu Kush and consolidated his position beneath its southern slopes in Kabul, the city which had replaced the old capital Kapisa. When finally he descended to the plains and marched on Delhi, the opposition he met with was perhaps scarcely more stubborn than that which confronted the Greeks, while the rebellion, which drove Babur's son Humayun into temporary exile, was brought about by a rival Afghan dynasty and not by any concerted movement of the indigenous population. The people of India in fact accepted Mogul rule as they had accepted Greek and Kushan rule, and as some 300 years later they were to accept British rule.

In the case of the British the pattern differed, in that for the first time the eventual rulers of the country came from the sea and not from across the Hindu Kush. But the outcome was the same. There was the same slight opposition to the new rulers, followed by the same willing co-operation on the part of the peoples of India. And in the policy of the rulers there was the same fundamental feature that the safety of India depends on the degree of control which the rulers of India can exert on the mountains of the Hindu Kush and the Oxus Valley beyond, for only thus can the 'barbarians' be kept at arm's length.

There seems to have been only one period in historical times during which a truly Indian Empire, that is an Empire founded and ruled by indigenous Indians, controlled the destinies of the greater part of India, and pushed forward her frontiers till they reached the Hindu Kush. This was the Maurya Empire founded by Chandragupta towards the end of the fourth century B.C., which rose to its greatest power under his grandson Asoka. It was Chandragupta who took advantage of the troublous times following the death of Alexander to advance from the Ganges to the Indus, driving out as he did so the small Greek garrisons established in northern India. About 304 B.C. Chandragupta encountered Seleucus, who had crossed the Hindu Kush with the intention of resuming Alexander's campaigns in India. Seleucus found, however, that Chandragupta was very much too strong to attack and consequently made a treaty with him, whereby the Greeks surrendered control of all the country lying between the Indus and the Hindu Kush in return for a large

force of elephants. There is also a story, mentioned by Tarn, that Seleucus gave one of his daughters to Chandragupta in marriage, which if true suggests that Asoka may have had Greek blood in his veins.¹ Such a possibility is interesting in view of Asoka's pre-eminence as a great ruler and administrator, but of course there is no proof.

The other great Empire of early historic India, the Gupta Empire, which flourished for about 150 years in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., hardly concerns my present argument, though I shall have to refer to it later. But this Empire does not appear ever to have pushed its boundaries far into northern India. Its rulers maintained diplomatic relations with the Saka and Kushan principalities, who had entered India some four centuries earlier and were still in possession of their territories in the Panjab and in the Kabul River valley. Both they and the Gupta Empire itself were swept away by the Ephthalites towards the end of the fifth century.²

We must also note that at the end of the tenth century A.D. a number of minor Hindu princes had established themselves once more in northern India. One of these, under Jaipal, Raja of the Panjab, had extended his dominions westward as far as Kabul, when he came in contact with the Ghaznavides and lost all his territories west of the Indus.³ These seem to have been the final efforts of the peoples of northern India to reassert their powers of rulership. They failed before the rising power of Islam, and Hindu domination in northern India disappeared, until at the break-up of the Mogul Empire 800 years later the militant religious confederacy of the Sikhs dominated the northern Panjab for a brief space.

History would thus seem so far to answer the question put to it by a British ruler of India as to show him that the British were not by any means unique in their domination of India, that they in fact only brought the story up to date, as the last of a long line of foreigners whose dominion over great parts of India extended back as far as history could reach, and that this dominion seems not only to have followed a more or less regular pattern, but also to have been accepted with goodwill by the great majority of the

¹ W. W. Tarn, *op. cit.*, Ch. IV, p. 152.

² *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*, Part I, Ch. VI.

³ *Ibid.*, Part II, Ch. I.

people of India. This answer gives us the facts, but it does not supply the full answer. It does not tell us why these things happened, but merely that they did happen. We must inquire further.

Chapter II

THE EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENT

IN the last chapter we reached the position of discovering a more or less regular pattern in the ebb and flow of history in northern India. I am now proposing to move a step further so as to ascertain if possible the reason for this pattern. It seems to be too regular to be mere coincidence and it seems to have been repeated too often to be an ephemeral condition of a phase of civilization which is not likely to continue. But in venturing this further step I am painfully conscious not only of my temerity but also of my inadequacy in undertaking such a task. Hitherto this book has dealt either with the facts of history or with an interpretation of facts based on a certain degree of first-hand knowledge. Now, however, we are passing out of the field of history into that of science or psychology or philosophy or perhaps of all three. We are seeking to discover the reason why the people of India have reacted in a similar way to a similar set of circumstances repeated over widely separated intervals. Or, to put the question in a different form, we are seeking the common factor which links together the repeated conquests of and dominion over India carried out by foreign races throughout the whole course of Indian history. To such a search I can bring at least one qualification, the fact that I was one of those who exercised for a brief time in a practical form this dominion over India. It is true that I was only a very small cog in a very large machine, but still I was in the machine and had an opportunity of considering at first hand the cause and the effect of what I was doing. This experience I bring to bear on the problem.

Let us start by clearing the ground of certain obstacles. The first of these is the suggestion, which is frequently made, that the invasions of India from the north were the work of nomad 'barbarians' from further Asia who descended suddenly on to the peaceful plains of northern India, plundered ruthlessly, and ruled precariously, as nomads will for a decade or two, till the indigenous population rose and destroyed them, or until they were absorbed into the civilization that they had conquered.

This is in reality far from a true picture. It cannot of course apply to the Greeks who came rather as liberators than as tyrants, whose tolerance of religious differences was as marked as our own, and who brought with them a civilization as great as anything they found in India. Nor is it possible to apply such a description to the Kushans, though their successors, the Ephthalites, seem to have been a more primitive and barbaric type and in consequence soon lost their grip on northern India.

In Islamic times the rulers of northern India, though possibly not far removed from their nomadic ancestry, were either scions of the princely houses of Ghor and Ghazni and of their Turkish generals, or members of great tribes like the Khalij, some of whom at any rate had long been domiciled in northern India.¹

It is indeed a striking circumstance, as we have already noted,² that the greatest and most powerful of all the nomads, the Mongols, only once seriously attempted the conquest of India, and then were unsuccessful. I am inclined to think that it was the climate which defeated them. Chenghiz Khan himself reached and crossed the Indus and got as far as Multan in the northern Panjab, and then turned north-eastward to Peshawar. If, as it is said, it was approaching high summer when he reached the plains of India, his refusal to remain in that inferno of heat and dust for a day longer than was necessary is easy to understand. He could never have experienced anything quite like it before even in the valley of the Oxus or among the sands of the Gobi. Even the spur of Islam and the zeal of an iconoclast could not drive Chenghiz Khan's great-grandson Timur to spend longer in India than was required to sack Delhi and loot the countryside. It took another century and a quarter to tame the wild nomad strain sufficiently for a descendant of Chenghiz Khan to found the Mogul Empire.

Next comes the argument that, while the domination of India by foreigners at intervals in history is an undoubted fact, this domination was not set in a regular pattern, since for instance while British rule covered the whole sub-continent of India, the Greek Empire never extended beyond Patna and was mainly confined to north-western India. This is of course true, but it does not affect the argument. The Greeks, and the Kushans too for that matter, could no doubt have conquered all India if they had wanted to do so, or if they had not been equally engaged

¹ Khalij or Ghilzai : see Pt. II, Ch. I.

² Pt. I, Ch. IV.

in spreading their dominion far north to Farghana, or even to Kashgar. The important thing is that they conquered with no very great difficulty great areas of northern India, and though comparatively few in number, held these areas for long periods. The Greeks appear to have had some military colonies,¹ and the Kushans no doubt settled some of their own people in northern India, but the vast majority of their subjects must have been the indigenous inhabitants of northern India and consequently a more virile people than those of central or southern India, who would have offered even less resistance to invading armies.

Another matter, which requires clearing up, is the argument that the British Empire of India did not end in disintegration and disaster, and so differed from previous foreign dominions in India such as the Mogul Empire. The British surrendered their sovereignty over India not because they lost the power to hold it, but because, having taught freedom and democracy to India for a century, they could not refuse her request for self-determination and for a government of the people for the people when India demanded it with one voice. Whether this is a just argument is a matter which time alone will show. The events are still too close on us to permit of a fair appraisal. It is possible that history will point to the surrender of British sovereignty in India as a sign of that mortal weakness which accompanies the decline of a once great nation, and a symbol of that period of hesitation and decline which ensues when the dominant minority begins to doubt its own authority and the power passes to the proletariat. All we can say for certain at present is that, given the history of the thirty years between 1917, when Mr. Montagu opened his campaign to associate Indians ever more closely with the management of their own affairs, and 1947, when the last symbol of British sovereignty took ship rather hastily from the shores of India, the British abdication was inevitable. Whether it was in the interests of the great silent majority of India, or in the wider interests of Asiatic stability and world peace, is not so clear.

In any case, whatever may have been the real cause for the termination of the British Empire of India, the circumstances of this Empire differed from those which had preceded it in one notable respect. Throughout the whole period of British rule the administration was fortified and rejuvenated by a constant

¹ W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Ch. VI, p. 358.

stream of fresh recruits from the centre of the Empire, the homeland. None other of the preceding Empires had been sustained in similar fashion.¹ It would appear rather that as each Empire before the British extended its sway across the plains of northern India, and assumed control of its vast new dominion, the focus of sovereignty and of interest was transferred with it, and its rulers in the course of a generation or two themselves became absorbed into India, losing many of their distinctive characteristics and assuming more and more of the nature and temperament of the people among whom they lived. This transformation did not take place in the case of the British, and the weakness, if it was weakness, which led up to the British surrender of authority, came from the directors of policy at home and not from those responsible in India for the maintenance of law and order.

Having cleared these three points out of the way we are left with the following proposition. The people of India have in the past submitted with remarkably good grace to foreign rule; this rule has tended for a variety of reasons to break away from the country of origin of the foreign rulers; the effect of such severance has been to cause the foreign rulers to assimilate themselves ever more closely to India and the Indian way of life and thought, with a consequent increasing inability to offer effective resistance to new invaders; only in the case of the last of the foreign rulers, the British, did their continued connexion with their homeland, and the preservation in India of their own way of life, enable them to maintain intact British sovereignty in India until they decided on a voluntary abdication.

If this proposition is correct, and I believe it is, we are inevitably brought to the conclusion that there must be something inherent in India itself which produces a disintegrating effect on people or races who dwell for generations on the great plains of the sub-continent. It is not primarily physical, since we who have served with Indian soldiers know that their physical stamina is considerable, and their powers of endurance, their ability to withstand hunger and fatigue, is nearly if not quite as great as those of the white races. Nor are they wanting in personal courage.

¹ The Mogul Empire was for a time fortified by the Turanian and Iranian immigrants from Central Asia and Persia. But jealousies and intrigue between these powerful factions was in the end a source of weakness rather than of strength to the Empire.

But there is something lacking, some mental or spiritual attribute which has in the past weakened in the races of India the powers of cohesion, of citizenship, of corporate resistance to outside influences. There is in the Urdu language a word 'ghabhrana', which has no exact English equivalent, but which may be approximately translated as 'to fall into a state of mental confusion'. It is significant that the principal language of northern India should include this word. It is an indication that this state of mind is sufficiently common, this lack of mental stamina so universal a feature of everyday life as to require a special word to describe it.

What then is the reason for this peculiar mentality? To anyone who has lived and worked for many years in India and with Indians, there is a very simple answer to this question, too simple perhaps to be wholly satisfying. It is the environment and particularly the climate in which the people of India live and have lived for countless generations. This is the answer given with all diffidence, but without any hesitation, not by an expert in such matters but by a layman. By a layman moreover who was not himself adversely affected by the Indian climate but who had his full share in the course of thirty years of the best and the worst of it. Let us not forget the best; the climate of the plains of northern India for a few short weeks, or even months, in winter can be delightful, cold and sunny with the thin keen air which one finds in the great land masses of the world, invigorating if not always healthy.

But what about the rest, the six to eight months when the temperature rises and rises till it may touch 120° F. in the shade, and the days and nights are just one long purgatory of heat and dust? I have driven along a frontier road on a June day knowing that a puncture or any prolonged delay under the midday sun would mean almost certain death from heat stroke. I have known many and many a night when sleep was out of the question save for a brief hour before dawn and then only under a great revolving fan on the topmost roof of the bungalow. I have seen the midday sun blood-red through a thick pall of dust and damp heat which covered the country like a blanket. Such has been the experience of all or nearly all those who have served India, but it requires the pen of genius to convey a true impression of the Indian hot-weather scene. Such description is to be found

scattered through Rudyard Kipling's works, and notably in his terribly vivid description of Lahore city by night, in the middle of the hot weather. Consider this paragraph for instance :

A stifling hot blast from the mouth of the Delhi gate nearly ends my resolution of entering the City of Dreadful Night at this hour. It is a compound of all evil savours, animal and vegetable, that a walled city can brew in a day and a night. The temperature within the motionless groves of plantain and orange trees outside the city walls seems chilly by comparison. Heaven help all sick persons and young children within the city to-night. The high house walls are still radiating heat savagely, and from obscure side gullies fetid breezes eddy. . . .¹

There is no exaggeration in this grim picture ; I too have seen cities and villages to which such conditions have applied for weeks, nay months, together in the stifling nights of the Indian hot weather. No one who has not experienced them can tell what those days and nights are like.

There are many other features of the Indian climate which seem to be equally deleterious : the steamy heat of the monsoon, the dangerous fever-stricken period which follows it, the terrible dust-storms of Rajputana and Sind which stir up all the disease-laden particles of this weary old land and send them whirling and driving in choking clouds through and through every dwelling in their path.

To anyone coming from the clean healthy countryside of Britain, this aspect of India was bound to be very striking. It gave one a great sympathy for and tolerance of Indian people, and indeed admiration for them, as for a people who all their lives had faced a terrible challenge from nature. It suggested that their whole lives were so taken up with the task of facing up to and overcoming these deadly weapons of nature that they had no power for more than this, and that they therefore accepted and indeed welcomed the assumption by some powerful outside agency of control over all those matters of citizenship and statecraft with which they had neither the energy nor the capacity to contend.

Indeed if one goes a step further and remembers that the original Aryan immigrants into India and some at any rate of the contemporary European races are of the same Indo-European

¹ ' The City of Dreadful Night ', from *Life's Handicap*, by R. Kipling.

stock, it is perhaps not too fantastic to suppose that the main if not the only difference between the rulers and the ruled in the British Empire of India has been the fact that for a period stretching over hundreds of succeeding generations the people of Britain have enjoyed one of the best climates in the world while their Aryan brethren in India have endured one of the worst.¹

This point of view was one which forced itself almost unwillingly on the consciousness as I sought for many years the answer to the riddle of British dominion in India. It was little if at all affected by the recent assumption by Indians of control over their own affairs, for it seemed that this decisive element in the life of India came from something deep-rooted in the spirit of India, some fundamental malaise which sprang from the whole environment in which the people of India lived so long, and which could not be dispelled by any act of man. It seemed, if one had been able to find the opportunity for such a study, that evidence in support of this point of view might be found in the culture, in the art, and most strikingly in the architecture of India. It seemed that the glories of Hindu culture and art belonged to a bygone age, to a time when the spirit which inspired the Rigveda and the great Hindu monuments of India had not been deadened and destroyed by the cumulative effects of the Indian environment.

These conclusions were reached as the result of an empirical approach to a subject of the greatest interest and importance, but a subject in which the amateur was likely very soon to find himself out of his depth. It seemed to me essential, before going further, to find some solid support for a theory which had had up till then no scientific basis whatever.

I found this support in the studies now being made, particularly in America, on the role of biological inheritance and physical environment in influencing the course of history. Here is to be found an analysis of the laws of migration which shows that this is systematically accompanied by selection, suggesting that the earliest immigrants into India of the Indo-European races were of a virile stock, who established themselves in India and founded the Indian civilization before the devastating climate, malnutrition, and disease had sapped their strength and produced the inertia derived from life in a tropical climate.

¹ I have not forgotten the differences between Christianity and Hinduism in this context. But a comparison of religions would be quite outside the scope of this study.

From this we turn to the present day. An analysis of the vigour and capacity of nations shows that 'in New Zealand, the most healthy of all countries, the average length of life (about 67 years) is more than twice as great as in India (27 years)'; and that in the relative rank of health and vigour and agricultural productivity India is last by a very large margin in a comparison of nine of the leading nations of the world. And finally we get this verdict :

India offers an impressive contrast to the western nations. Its people as a whole seem to be born tired . . . they are not really ill, but suffer from poor nutrition and a depressing climate. . . . India is a conspicuous example of the way in which the philosophy, religion and ideals of a country—its national character—as well as the social and economic systems tend to conform to bodily feelings induced primarily by climate and dirt, but modified by the stage of culture.¹

The general conclusion which emerges from this study of the effect of environment on the growth of civilization confirms in striking fashion the opinion formed by practical experience. It shows that the 'optimum' environment for such growth is to be found in such areas as western Europe, eastern America, New Zealand, and similar localities, and that while civilizations have flourished in places far removed from the 'optimum', they have never, and could never have, reached the peak of material and scientific efficiency attained under the stimulus of an invigorating and healthy environment. These conclusions explain much though perhaps not all of the handicap under which the peoples of India have laboured throughout their history.

As we view these phases of Indian history we are driven forcibly to the conclusion that the physical environment, in which the peoples lived who entered India and remained there through succeeding generations, had a marked effect on their powers of resistance to external domination. But our search will not be quite complete until we have tried to ascertain exactly what this effect has been. As I have noted it is not purely physical, since though many of the peasants of India live on or near the bare subsistence line and are consequently lacking both in physique and stamina, large numbers if taken young and well looked after acquire an excellent physique and great powers of endurance.

¹ These extracts are reprinted by permission from *Mainsprings of Civilisation*, by E. Huntington, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1945.

Nor is it altogether a mental attitude. It is not easy to compare the mental capabilities of Indians with those of other civilizations, but although the rate of illiteracy in India is high this is due rather to a want of opportunity than to a lack of intelligence. It would be an insult to the Indian people to suggest that among them are not to be found men of the highest intellectual standards capable of profound and original thought in all or nearly all branches of learning and culture.

If, however, we consider Indian society as a whole we find that Indians are lacking in certain qualities which when combined constitute the framework of society; such qualities as the ability to compromise, the sense of civic responsibility, the mutual trust and confidence on which society must rely in times of stress for its survival. We may say of Indian society that it has not got the cohesion with which to offer resistance to external impact and that it is in fact in a state of disintegration, or would be if it had not been held together by the steel frame of foreign domination.

But when we get so far as to examine the structure of a society and consider what has caused its disintegration as in the present case, it is not perhaps wholly convincing to content ourselves with the simple physical explanation of environment. The effect of an enervating climate, of malnutrition, faulty hygiene and the terrible blast of the hot-weather sun, must be held at any rate partly responsible for India's failure in the past to maintain herself against the domination of foreigners. But these factors have probably always been present in India within historical times, and if they were wholly responsible we should find throughout the pages of Indian history a dismal story of progressive deterioration in society. But this we do not find. We find that once at least in historical times the people of India gathered strength under the leadership of the Maurya dynasty to establish an Indian Empire whose frontiers rested on the mountains of the Hindu Kush. Five hundred years later the Gupta Empire consolidated a great part of central India for a brief hundred years under one sovereignty, while Hinduism was still vigorous in the Kabul River Valley up to the time of Mahmud of Ghazni (A.D. 1000).

I get the impression, when trying to view the Indian scene as a whole, of a society striving against, and gradually dominated by its environment, but a society in which at intervals the unconquer-

able spirit of man masters the environment and in the guise of some great leader or leaders carries the nation or part of it forward for a brief space.

If, however, we turn to the greatest and most recent study of the history of human society,¹ we find that while 'The Disintegration of Civilization' forms a very important part of this as yet unfinished work,² the effect of physical environment is held to play but a small part in the growth, maturity, and decay of civilizations. It is not my intention to attempt an analysis of Dr. Toynbee's study as applied to India. Such an undertaking would be quite beyond the scope of this work. But, in my search for confirmation of the belief that Indian society is in a process of disintegration, I propose to describe very shortly the stages through which *A Study of History* shows this society to have passed.

The oldest society of India of which we have knowledge is the society, called by Toynbee the Indic, which disappeared during the 'time of troubles' which followed the fall of the Gupta Empire. The Indic society grew at a time which has left its record in the Vedas, and had its origins in the Indus and Upper Ganges Valleys, from which it spread throughout India. The growth was followed by a time of troubles and its disintegration was preceded by the Maurya and Gupta Empires which formed its 'universal state'. As it disintegrated, the Hindu society to which the Indic was 'apparented' rose in more or less the same geographical position as its predecessor.³

If we follow the Hindu society through the same stages of growth, time of troubles, and disintegration we find that the period of growth was very short, from about A.D. 800 to 1100 or 1200, that the time of troubles which followed it lasted from the Muhammadan invasions till the establishment of the universal state in the shape of the Mogul Empire 400 years later; and that this universal state, which was continued in the British Empire of India, has warded off final disintegration from the Hindu society for another 450 years. The disappearance of the British Empire of India, which marks the end of the universal state, should be followed by an 'interregnum' which may last several centuries before a new society arises on the debris of its predecessor.

¹ A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*.

² Op. cit., Vols. V and VI.

³ Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 84.

When we turn to inquire what are the causes for the breakdown of civilization, we find that the *Study of History* sums up the causes in these words: 'a loss of creative power in the souls of creative individuals or minorities, a loss which divests them of their magic power to influence the soul of uncreative masses'.¹ And when we go on further to inquire what is the cause of the disintegration of a civilization, we find the answer to be that this disintegration is caused by the failure of society to respond to a challenge.

. . . the unanswered challenge can never be disposed of, and is bound to present itself again and again until it either receives some tardy and imperfect response or else brings about the destruction of the society which has shown itself inveterately incapable of responding to it effectively.²

This failure to respond to challenge takes many different forms, which are grouped under schisms in the Body Social and schisms in the Soul. That is to say that we are not dealing here with challenges presented by nature; and it is here that *A Study of History*, carrying the argument from the physical on to the spiritual plane, differs in so vital a fashion from the purely scientific or empirical approach to this engrossing and hazardous subject.

I do not propose to pursue the argument further. It seems sufficient to state it, and to note that while I have reached my conclusions by a different path from that taken by Dr. Toynbee, I have at any rate the support of *A Study of History* in my belief that the Hindu civilization is not emerging, as some have thought, from the bondage of British rule into a new and vigorous period of growth, but is in fact in an advanced stage of disintegration. It is in such a light that we must consider the new dominions lately arisen as successors to the universal state which had supported them for so long.

¹ Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 5.

² Op. cit., Vol. V, p. 12.

Chapter III

CONCLUSION

I MUST now draw together the threads of the last two chapters and see whether history has in fact anything to teach us, anything which we can add to the story of the Hindu Kush, as we peer into the unknown future. In doing so I am not unmindful of the recent warning of a distinguished English writer :

We can learn little from history unless we first realize that she does not in fact repeat herself. Events are not affected by analogies ; they may be determined by the combination of circumstance. And since circumstances vary from generation to generation it is illusive to suppose that any pattern of history, however similar it may at first appear, is likely to repeat itself exactly in the kaleidoscope of time.¹

This is a warning which I do not propose to ignore, though I note in passing that certain circumstances, such as climate, do not vary much if at all between one generation and the next. But in fact I have done no more in the two preceding chapters than seek to ascertain what is to be found behind the façade of modern India once the covering of British rule has been removed. In so doing I have uncovered an ancient civilization in an advanced state of disintegration. I have discovered that this society, worn down by an environment of the utmost severity, has been incapable for many hundreds of years of resisting the domination of foreigners, and has indeed accepted such domination with equanimity. What then does the future hold for such a society which, after sheltering behind foreign rule for a thousand years, now finds itself face to face with the great problems of survival in a world torn and rent by the clash of ideologies and all the conflicts of modern life ? One must admit that the picture is not very reassuring, though it is perhaps not quite so disquieting as it would have been had the British and Indian politicians had their way, and a so-called united India had emerged from their deliberations. For in such an India, united in its trappings of

¹ Harold Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna*, Introduction.

a modern civilized state, but disunited not only in the 'horizontal schisms' of caste and race but in the still more dangerous schisms of two fundamentally antagonistic creeds, all the forces of disintegration would have combined to destroy the already weakened Hindu civilization. This catastrophe has been averted for the present at any rate. The Hindu civilization of India, under the guidance of an able Brahmin hierarchy and of the Parsi industrialists,¹ may perhaps achieve stability and ward off final disintegration for some considerable time yet, so long as the rulers do not attempt to dominate all India, or to emulate the Mauryas by pushing forward their boundaries towards the Hindu Kush. They will not, or at any rate should not, take part in any further discussions on the future of the north-western frontiers of India, save possibly as financial backers to any scheme of frontier defence intended to safeguard the whole sub-continent.

But with the departure of the British in 1947 the whole fabric of the defence of India through the buffer state has come to an end, in fact if not in diplomatic theory. There remains a British and American interest in the maintenance of Muslim integrity in Southern Asia, the force of world opinion and the influence of the United Nations in upholding international treaties and boundaries, and lastly the power of two Muslim states, the one brave to a fault but impoverished, thinly populated and backward, the other new, untried, politically unstable, and affected to some extent by the disintegrating influence of environment. Behind them is the Hindu civilization of great bulk but with little stamina. The situation is by no means hopeful.

On the other side there is the extraordinary anomaly of the great Russian dominions covering a sixth of the land surface of the globe, but with no direct outlet to the open sea save in the Arctic and Pacific Oceans. It is difficult for islanders like the British, for Americans with their immense seaboard, or even for the people of western Europe to realize what must be the effect in the development of a civilization of being cut off, as are the vast majority of the Russian people, from access to the sea and the freedom of world intercourse which such access provides. The isolation in which the Russian people live is rendered more

¹ The Parsis are quoted by Huntington as an instance of selection producing a people who are 'proverbial for their sagacity, activity and commercial enterprise in spite of a physical and cultural environment which is distinctly repressive'. *Mainsprings of Civilisation*, Ch. 8.

complete and more menacing by the fact of their imprisonment in the great land mass of the U.S.S.R., a circumstance which gives the rulers of Russia the power they seek to keep their people unaware of what is happening in the world around them. For the present this isolation suits the policy of the rulers in the Kremlin, while they watch the effect of Communist infiltration on the world beyond their borders. Such infiltration has taken hold in South-East Asia and in Burma, and it will not be easy to eradicate. Its power in Hindu India depends on how far the dominant minority, the Brahmins and the caste Hindus, have the vision to place before all other considerations the welfare of the peasants and the prosperity of the workers, and by their sympathy and understanding lessen the gap between themselves and the 'lower classes' which has hitherto been filled by the British, while at the same time they give a vitality to their administration which no foreign bureaucracy could possibly supply. Thus, and only thus, will the rulers of India save their civilization from Communism and final disintegration.

For the inhabitants of the north-west the danger of Communist infiltration is not so great, for such doctrines do not easily take root in the strongholds of Islam. Only a supreme discontent and great material impoverishment could produce such a result. The danger to the people of the north-west comes from a different source. In between these two peoples, the Afghans and the people of Pakistan, lies the vexed tribal question. Already, as we have seen, the British forward policy of the 1920s had spent its force and a withdrawal from the outpost of Razmak of the regular garrison and its replacement by civil defence forces was envisaged. There was much to be said for such a transposition of force, and I myself was in favour of it when it was first mooted a year or two before the war. For though such a withdrawal of regular troops from advanced posts bore an unhappy resemblance to the discarded Curzon policy,¹ the fact of air power and the knowledge that at any time a beleaguered post could be succoured and possibly reinforced from the air, was a very important consideration. But more important still was the fact that the British Raj, if it discarded, did so from strength and not from weakness; it would have done so at a time when it had complete mastery of the tribal situation, at any rate so far as the defence of

¹ Pt. II, Ch. XIII.

India's administered frontiers was concerned. To retire in any other circumstances, even as a gesture of goodwill, from one's own international boundaries is not a wise move. It is well not to forget in dealing with such a situation that 'when a frontier between civilization and barbarism stands still, time always works in the barbarians' favour'.¹ In this case the frontier has not stood still; it has to some small extent receded.

What then is the answer to this tribal question, now that the British Raj has gone, and the patient, steady pressure of a very powerful régime is no longer there? Let history supply the answer, always remembering that no 'pattern of history, however similar it may at first appear, is likely to repeat itself exactly'.

History shows us that he who holds the Hindu Kush holds the key to India, and that the urge to descend from the highlands and possess the rich lands of the plain is sooner or later irresistible, particularly when the people of the plain share to some extent the disintegration of their Hindu neighbours with whom and among whom they have lived for countless generations. I do not wish this to be held to imply that I believe that the Government and people of Afghanistan are at this present time contemplating a descent on the valley of the Indus. I am sure they have no such intention, the fact of international boundaries and that Pakistan is still a member of the Commonwealth is a sufficient deterrent to a Government which has consistently shown itself faithful to its international obligations and loyal to its friends. But I am equally sure that there is an impulse stronger than obligations and treaties which will sooner or later, and perhaps sooner than later, bring these highlanders down off their hills to possess themselves of the goods and perhaps of the lands of their neighbours on the plains. They can be prevented by the concerted action of the two Governments concerned, and in no other way.

It is indeed a strange feature of this complicated situation that there exists, like a canker in the body politic of northern India, this collection of 'independent' tribes, well armed, intractable and formidable, who may at any time disturb the relations and disrupt the economy of either of the states in whose midst they dwell. It is an anachronism and a danger to the stability of northern India and the peace of Central Asia. The remedy is

¹ *A Study of History*, Vol. II, p. 143.

the fusion of the two states of Afghanistan and Pakistan in some way or other. It may be argued that, given the differences in mental and political outlook of the two states, such fusion is impossible. This may be so ; I am in no position to argue the matter. But history suggests that fusion *will* take place, if not peaceably, then by force.

For consider the structure of these two states. Afghanistan is the core and the remnant of a once mighty Empire ; it is the glacis of a great mountain range, an outpost designed by nature to guard the approaches to India, and decreed by man to survive in this capacity. Unfortunately the Pathan races, which make up the ruling portion of the Afghan nation, have spilled over their mountain boundaries and spread down into the plains, so that in large areas of Pakistan dwell a people whose affinities are with Kabul, so far as they are with anybody, and not with Karachi. As it stands at present behind the artificial boundary of the Durand Line, Afghanistan is ethnographically, economically, and geographically an incomplete state.

Of Pakistan it is difficult to say anything at present. It was carved hastily out of different parts of India, inhabited by totally different types of people, and as it stands it is perhaps the strangest sovereign state that ever came into being. But the north-western portions, straggling and ill-assorted though they may be, are of vital importance in constituting the main support to Afghanistan in the defence of the approaches to India against the 'barbarians', and in completing the structure of a state at present truncated by an artificial frontier. These two states, closely integrated, prosperous and peaceful, would have a notable part to play as forming a powerful eastern bastion to the long line of Islamic states which stretch between the Bosphorus and the Pamirs. But if they are not so integrated, if they are divided and torn by political and economic differences, by national antagonism and by the absurdities of the Durand Line, then they will offer that condition favourable to revolution which gives Communism its opportunity.

For whatever happens in north-western India, there is one great factor in the political development of Central Asia which is likely to increase in importance as time passes. Great areas in Russian territories across the Oxus are being developed and to some extent industrialized. This process will in time lead to a demand

for access to the sea, for a port through which Russian merchandise can be exported to the markets of the world, and through which imports may enter Central Asia. There is one port to which access can easily be obtained from the Russian frontier in Central Asia, and only one, the port of Karachi. A railway line, running from Kushk on the Russian frontier by Herat and Qandahar to link with the Pakistan railway system, would encounter no obstacles save the River Helmand, till at Chaman on the Pakistan border the gauge is broken. Proposals by the Soviet Government for such a link with the outside world might easily and profitably be entertained if the States to which they were made were strong, friendly, and united, and had behind them the moral support of the Americans and the British. But, if they were weakened by economic and political discords and unable to present a united front to the 'barbarians' from the north, then once again the floodgates would open and the control of the Hindu Kush would pass into other hands.

*Appendix I*¹

LETTER FROM MR. SECRETARY MACNAGHTEN TO CAPTAIN A. BURNES, ON A MISSION TO KABUL

DATED CALCUTTA, 11 SEPTEMBER 1837

I am directed by the Right Honourable the Governor General to acknowledge receipt of your two letters, dated the 31st July last and the 1st ultimo, reporting your progress towards Cabool, and the circumstances attending it.

2. I am in the first place desired to convey to you His Lordship in Council's entire approbation of the judgment and zeal manifested by you in all your proceedings already reported.

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4. The very important intelligence contained in your letter of the 1st ultimo has induced the Governor General in Council to alter in some measure the views under which your deputation to Cabool was originally designed.

5. That a Persian elchee has arrived (accompanied by a member of the Candahar family) is nearly certain. It appears probable . . . that you will have a difficult duty to perform under the circumstances by which Dost Muhammad will be surrounded. The quiet and unassuming character given at the outset to your mission will, owing to recent events, be very much changed ; and instead of your being merely the bearer of an invitation to the Ameer of general friendship and for a more free and cordial intercourse in matters of commerce, you may be looked for as an arbiter of peace, and possibly as a supporter of extravagant pretensions.

6. It might have been well, perhaps, if under existing circumstances you had in the first instance visited Candahar and Herat rather than Cabool, but it might bear the character of instability of purpose if your course were now changed, even were it not too late to do so ; and supposing you to have arrived at Cabool, it is evident that you cannot confine yourself, in the existing state of excitement, to matters of a commercial nature.

7. It is not the intention of the Governor General in Council to invest you with any direct political power beyond that of transmitting

¹ See Pt. II, Ch. V.

any proposition which may appear to you to be reasonable through Captain Wade to your own Government.

8. You are authorised, however, whenever an opportunity shall be afforded to you to communicate without reserve with Dost Muhammad upon his actual position, and to point out the light in which that position is considered by the Governor General in Council; our desire to see established the peace and security and independence of his dominions, and our regret to find him exposed to the hazards of war on one side, and excited to restlessness by interference and worthless promises on the other; that under any circumstances our first feeling must be that of regard for the honour and just wishes of our old and firm ally Runjit Singh; that if however he looked for terms of peace adapted to a fair measure of his position, such good offices in his favour with the Maharajah as we can render would be given to him; but that if he received with favour every emissary and every proposition, the avowed object of which was to foment disturbances even at the hazard of his own independence, it is impossible but that the friendly feelings of the British Government must be impaired.

9. You will be careful, if you should come in contact with the Persian envoy, so to temper the personal civility and respect with which you will treat him, as to admit no claim of undue importance, and you will at once state to Dost Muhammad that we cannot recognise a right in the Shah of Persia to interfere in any way in his transactions with the Sikh or British Government; you will take care to show to him, in the strongest light, how utterly vain must be his hopes of assistance from the Persian Government, the resources of which are inadequate for the requirements of its own Government.

10. It is possible that these representations may have but little effect at the present moment, and it will be for you, upon a review of the influence which you are likely to gain upon passing events to decide upon the propriety of prolonging your stay in Cabool.

11. If your stay can be prolonged with propriety it is obvious that the information which you may be able to collect of the power, the means and the state of parties in that country cannot but be useful.

12. You will of course deem it your duty to discourage all extravagant pretensions on the part of Dost Muhammad. In the present state of his information His Lordship in Council would be inclined to think that, if Peshawar were restored to any members of the Barukzye family on the condition of tribute to Runjit Singh the terms would be as favourable as any that could be expected; and if Dost Muhammad rejecting all attempts at drawing him into an alliance with Persia should consent to the restoration of permanent tranquility on this basis, and the tenor of your information from Captain Wade be such

as to confirm you in this course . . . you are authorised to state that you will recommend to your Government the support of such an arrangement in the manner which shall be most conducive to the honour and interests of all parties, but you should apprise the Ameer that the cultivation of all alliance with powers to the westward must cease as the indispensable condition of our friendly intervention.

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14. As your ulterior proceedings must be altogether guided by the nature of your reception at Cabool, his Lordship in Council feels unable to furnish you with any specific instructions for your guidance beyond that point ; but you have full authority to proceed to Candahar and Herat should you be of opinion that your presence in those countries would have the effect of counteracting Persian intrigues and of promoting the general tranquility of the countries bordering on the Indus.

*Appendix II*¹

TRANSLATION OF PRINCE GORCHAKOV'S MEMORANDUM

DATED ST. PETERSBURG, 21 NOVEMBER 1864

The Russian newspapers have described the military operations, which have been carried out by a detachment of our troops in the regions of Central Asia with remarkable success and vast results. It was inevitable that these events should excite attention in foreign countries, and the more so because their theatre lies in regions which are hardly known.

Our august Master has directed me to explain succinctly, but with clearness and precision, our position in Central Asia, the interests which prompt our actions in that part of the world, and the aims which we pursue. The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilised states which come into contact with half-savage, wandering tribes possessing no fixed social organisation.

It invariably happens in such cases that the interests of security on the frontier, and of commercial relations, compel the more civilised state to exercise a certain ascendancy over neighbours whose turbulence and nomad instincts render them difficult to live with. First, we have incursions and pillage to repress. In order to stop these we are compelled to reduce the tribes on our frontier to a more or less complete submission. Once this result is attained they become less troublesome, but in their turn they are exposed to the aggression of more distant tribes. The state is obliged to defend them against these depredations, and chastise those who commit them. Hence the necessity of distant and costly expeditions, repeated at frequent intervals, against an enemy whose social organisation enables him to elude pursuit. If we content ourselves with chastising the freebooters and then retire, the lesson is soon forgotten. Retreat is ascribed to weakness, for Asiatics respect only visible and palpable force; that arising from the exercise of reason and a regard for the interests of civilisation has as yet no hold on them. The task has therefore to be performed over again.

In order to cut short these perpetual disorders we established strong places in the midst of a hostile population, and thus we obtained an ascendancy which shortly but surely reduced them to a more or less

¹ See Pt. II, Ch. VII.

willing submission. But beyond this line there are other tribes which soon provoked the same dangers, the same repression. The state then finds itself on the horns of a dilemma. It must abandon the incessant struggle and deliver its frontier over to disorder, which renders property, security and civilisation impossible; or it must plunge into the depths of savage countries, where the difficulties and sacrifices to which it is exposed increase with each step in advance. Such has been the lot of all countries placed in the same conditions. The United States in America, France in Algiers, Holland in her colonies, England in India,—all have been inevitably drawn into a course wherein ambition plays a smaller part than imperious necessity, and where the greatest difficulty is in knowing where to stop.

Such are the reasons which have induced the Imperial Government to establish itself, on the one side on the Sri Darya, and on the other on the Lake of Issik-kul, and to consolidate the two lines by advanced forts which little by little have penetrated the heart of these distant regions, but have not sufficed to secure tranquility on the frontier. The cause of this instability lies firstly in the existence between the extremities of this double line of forts of a vast unoccupied tract where the incursions of robber tribes continue to neutralise our attempts at colonisation and our caravan traffic. It is in the second place due to perpetual changes in the political aspect of the countries to the south of our border. Turkistan and Khokand are sometimes united, sometimes separated, but are always at war, either with each other or with Bukhara, and offer no probability of settled relations or regular transactions with them.

Thus in our own despite the Imperial Government finds itself reduced to the dilemma already stated: it must allow an anarchy to become chronic which paralyses all security and all progress, and involves distant and expensive expeditions at frequent intervals; or on the other hand it must enter on a career of conquest and annexation such as gave England her Indian Empire, in view of dominating in succession the petty independent states whose turbulent habits and perpetual revolts leave their neighbour neither truce nor repose. Neither of these alternatives is in consonance with the object of my august Master's policy, which aims at restricting the extent of the countries subject to his sceptre within reasonable limits, while it places his rule thereon on firm foundations, guarantees their security, and develops their social organisation, their commerce, well-being and civilisation.

Our task therefore has been to seek a system fitted to attain the triple object. In this view the following principles have been formulated :—

(i) It has been considered indispensable that the two fortified frontier lines, the one stretching from China to Lake Issik-kul, the other from the Sea of Aral along the lower course of the Sri Darya, should be linked together by a chain of strongholds, so that each fort should be in position to afford mutual support and leave no space open to the incursions of nomad tribes.

(ii) It was essential that the line of forts thus completed should be placed in a fertile country, not only in order to ensure supplies, but to facilitate regular colonisation which alone can give an occupied country a future of stability and prosperity, or attract neighbouring tribes to civilised life.

(iii) It was a matter of urgency to fix this line in a definite manner in order to escape the danger of being drawn on from repression to reprisals which might end in a limitless expansion of our empire.

With this object it was necessary to lay the foundations of a system founded not merely on considerations of expediency but on geographical and political data which are fixed and permanent.

This system was disclosed to us by a very simple fact, the result of long experience, namely that nomad tribes which cannot be overtaken, punished or kept in hand are the worst neighbours possible; while agricultural and commercial populations, wedded to the soil, and given a more highly developed social organisation, afford for us a basis for friendly relations which may become all that can be wished.

Our frontier line then should include the first, and stop at the boundaries of the second.

These three principles afford a clear, natural and logical explanation of the recent military operations accomplished in Central Asia.

Moreover our old frontier stretching along the Sri Darya to Fort Perovski on one side and on the other as far as Lake Issik-kul, had the disadvantage of being almost at the edge of the desert. It was interrupted by an immense gap between the farthest points on the east and west. It offered very insufficient supplies to our troops, and left beyond it unsettled tribes with which we could not maintain stable relations.

In spite of our repugnance to give wider scope to our dominion these conditions were powerful enough to induce the Imperial Government to establish a frontier between Lake Issik-Kul and the Sri Darya by fortifying the town of Chimkent recently occupied by us. In adopting this line we obtain a twofold result. First the country which it includes is fertile, well-wooded and watered by numerous streams; it is inhabited in part by Khirghiz tribes which have already acknowledged our supremacy, and therefore offers conditions favourable to colonisation and the supply of our garrison. Then it gives

us the agricultural and commercial population of Khokand as our neighbours.

Thus we find ourselves confronted by a solid and compact social organisation—one less shifting and better arranged. This consideration marks with geographical precision the limit where interest and reason command us to stop. On the one hand attempts to extend our rule will no longer encounter such unstable entities as nomad tribes, but more regularly organised states and will therefore be carried out at the cost of great effort, leading us from annexation to annexation into difficulties the end of which cannot be foreseen. On the other hand as we have as our neighbours states of that description, in spite of their low civilisation and nebulous political development, we hope that regular relations may one day in our common interest replace the chronic disorders which have hitherto hampered their progress.

Such are the principles which are the mainspring of our august Master's policy in Central Asia ; such the final goal which His Imperial Majesty has prescribed as that of his Cabinet's action.

There is no necessity to insist on the palpable interest of Russia in restricting the growth of her territory and preventing the advent of complications in distant provinces which may retard and paralyse our domestic development.

The programme which I have just traced is in strict accord with this policy.

People of late years have been pleased to credit us with a mission to civilise neighbouring countries on the continent of Asia. The progress of civilisation has no more efficacious ally than commercial relations. These require in all countries order and stability as conditions essential to their growth ; but in Asia their existence implies a revolution in the manners of the people. Asiatics must before all things be made to understand that it is more advantageous to favour and assure trade by caravans than to pillage them. These elementary principles can penetrate the public conscience only when there is a public ; that is to say a social organisation and a government which directs and represents it. We are accomplishing the first portion of this task in extending our frontier to points where these indispensable conditions are to be met with. We accomplish the second when we undertake the duty of proving to neighbouring states by a policy of firmness as regards the repression of their misdeeds but of moderation and justice in the employment of armed strength and of respect for their independence that Russia is not their foe, that she cherishes no design of conquest, and that peaceful and commercial relations with her are more profitable than disorder, pillage, reprisals, and chronic warfare. In devoting herself to this task the Russian Cabinet has

the interests of the Empire in view ; but we believe that its accomplishment will also serve those of civilisation and humanity at large. We have a right to count upon an equitable and loyal appreciation of the policy which we follow, and the principles on which it is framed.

GORCHAKOV

*Appendix III*¹

I

LETTER FROM MR. GRIFFIN TO S. ABDUR RAHMAN KHAN

DATED 14 JUNE 1880

My friend, I have received your letter of 16th May by the hand of S. Ibrahim Khan, Sardar Bahadur, who arrived at Kabul on the 23rd May, and have fully understood its friendly sentiments, and the desire which it expresses for a cordial understanding between the British Government and yourself. This letter together with the memorandum of the Members of the mission, which was shown to you before dispatch, and which mentioned certain matters regarding which you desired further information, has been laid before His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor General of India; and I am now commanded to convey to you the replies of the Government of India to the questions which you have asked.

Firstly. With regard to the position of the Ruler of Kabul to foreign powers, since the British Government admit no right of interference by foreign powers in Afghanistan, and since both Russia and Persia are pledged to abstain from all political interference with Afghan affairs, it is plain that the Kabul ruler can have no political relations with any foreign power except the English; and if any such power should attempt to interfere in Afghanistan, and if such interference should lead to unprovoked aggression on the Kabul ruler, then the British Government will be prepared to aid him if necessary to repel it, provided that he follows the advice of the British Government in regard to his external relations.

Secondly. With regard to limits of territory, I am directed to say that the whole province of Kandahar has been placed under a separate ruler, except Pishin and Sibi, which are retained in British possession. Consequently the Government is not able to enter into any negotiations with you on these points, nor in respect to arrangements with regard to the North Western Frontier, which were concluded with the Ex-Amir Muhammad Yakub Khan. With these reservations the British Government are willing that you should establish over Afghanistan—including Herat, the possession of which cannot be guaranteed to you, though Government are not disposed to hinder measures which you

¹ See Pt. II, Ch. IX (1).

may take to obtain possession of it—as complete and extensive authority as has been hitherto exercised by any Amir of your family. The British Government desires to exercise no interference in your internal government of these territories, nor will you be required to admit an English Resident anywhere; although for convenience of ordinary friendly intercourse between two contiguous states it may be advisable to station, by agreement, a Muhammadan agent of the British Govt at Kabul.

If you should, after clearly understanding the wishes and intentions of the British Government, as stated in former letters and now further explained, desire these matters to be stated in a formal writing, it is necessary that you should first intimate plainly your acceptance or refusal of the invitation of the British Government, and should state your proposals for carrying into effect friendly arrangements.

Sardar Wazirzada Muhammad Afzal Khan has been ordered to leave Khanabad within five days after receipt of this letter, as it is necessary to understand from him by word of mouth, the position of affairs and your wishes and sentiments. Should your reply be sent by his hand it will prevent delay and will accelerate the conclusion of final arrangements, and consequently the Government trusts that you will be able to make use of his agency.

II

LETTER FROM S. ABDUR RAHMAN KHAN TO MR. GRIFFIN

DATED 22 JUNE 1880

The kind letter, sent by the hand of Taj Muhammad Khan, telling me of your welfare and friendship, arrived on the 20th June, and caused me great pleasure. What was the wish and object of myself and people you yourself have kindly granted.

Regarding the boundaries of Afghanistan which were settled by treaty with my most noble and respected grandfather, Dost Muhammad these you have granted to me. And the Envoy which you have appointed in Afghanistan you have dispensed with, but what you have left to be settled according to my wish is, that I may keep a Muhammadan Ambassador, if I please. This was my desire and that of my people, and this you have kindly granted.

About my friendly relations and communications with foreign powers, you have written that I should not have any without advice

and consultation with you (the British). You should consider well that if I have the friendship of a great Government like yours, how can I communicate with another Power without advice and consultations with you? I agree to this also.

You have also kindly written that should any unwarranted (improper) attack be made by any other Power on Afghanistan, you will under all circumstances afford me assistance; and you will not permit any other person to take possession of the territory of Afghanistan. This is also my desire, which you have kindly granted.

As to what you have written about Herat. Herat is at present in the possession of my cousin. So long as he does not oppose me and remains friendly with me, it is better that I should leave my cousin in Herat, rather than any other man. Should he oppose me, and not listen to my advice or those of my people, I will afterwards let you know. Everything shall be done as we both deem it expedient and advisable.

All the kindness you have shown is for my welfare and that of my people, how should I not accept it? You have shown me very great kindness to me and to my people.

I have written and sent letters containing full particulars to all the tribes of Afghanistan, and I have given copies of these papers to S. Muhammad Afzal Khan, for transmission to you, and I have communicated verbally to Afzal Khan certain matters.

Three days after this I will give him leave to start. Consider me also, the slave of the threshold of God, as having already arrived at Parwan.

Send me back a verbal reply by Muhammad Afzal Khan so that he may reach me on the road wherever I may be. Dated 13th Rajab.

[PS. In Abdur Rahman's own hand.]

I have signed and sealed this envelope with wax.

In this letter and the former letters, all is written by the same hand, and there is no alteration anywhere.

III

LETTER¹ FROM MR. GRIFFIN TO HIS
HIGHNESS SIRDAR ABDUR RAHMAN
KHAN, AMIR OF KABUL

DATED THE — JULY 1880

After compliments.

His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor General in Council has learnt with pleasure that Your Highness has proceeded towards Kabul, in accordance with the invitation of the British Government. Therefore in consideration of the friendly sentiments by which your Highness is animated, and of the advantage to be derived by the Sirdars and people from the establishment of a settled Government under Your Highness's authority, the British Government recognises Your Highness as Amir of Kabul.

I am further empowered on the part of the Viceroy and Governor General of India, to inform Your Highness that the British Government has no desire to interfere in the internal Government of the territories in the possession of Your Highness, and has no wish that an English Resident should be stationed anywhere within those territories. For the convenience of ordinary friendly intercourse, such as is maintained between two adjoining States, it may be advisable that a Muhammadan Agent of the British Government should reside, by agreement at Kabul.

Your Highness has requested that the views and intentions of the British Government with regard to the position of the ruler at Kabul in relation to Foreign Powers should be placed on record for Your Highness's information.

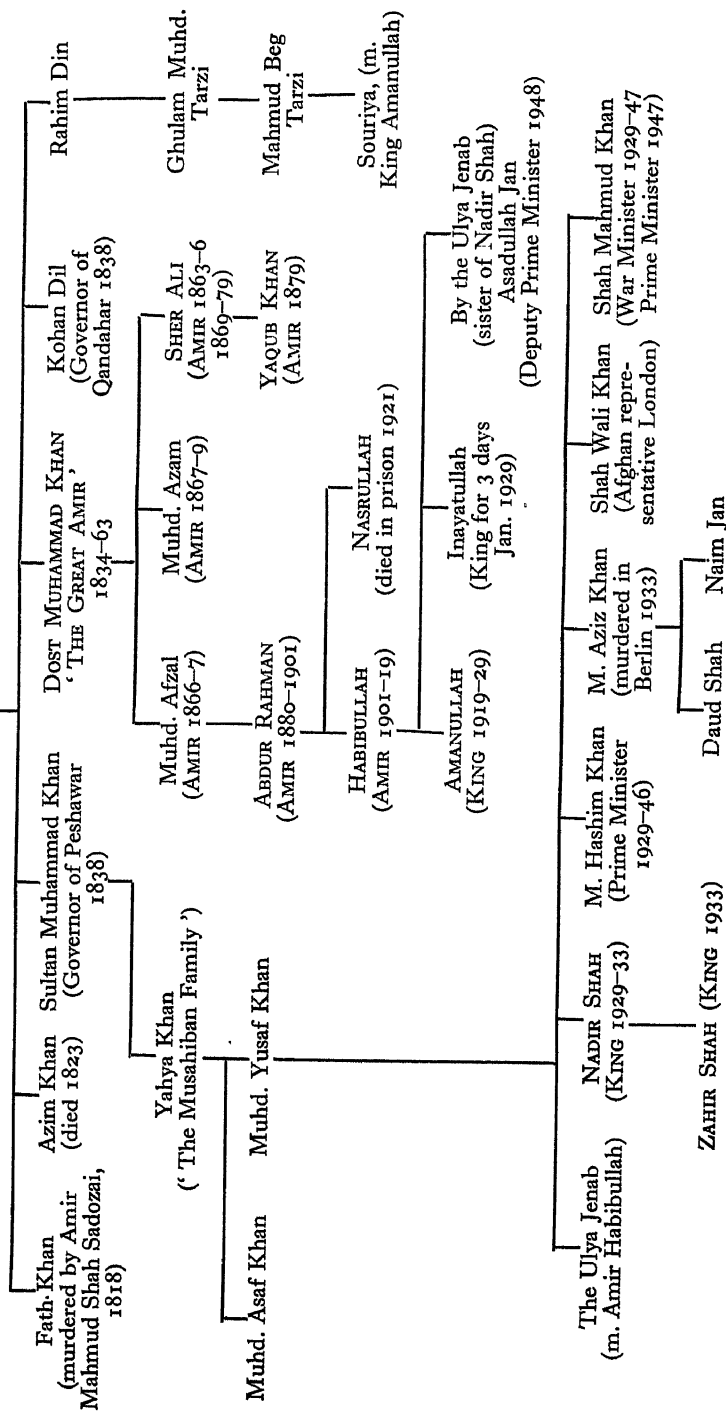
The Viceroy and Governor General in Council authorises me to declare to you that since the British Government admits no right of interference by Foreign Powers within Afghanistan, it is plain that your Highness can have no political relations with any Foreign Power except with the British Government. If any Foreign Power should attempt to interfere in Afghanistan, and if such interference should lead to unprovoked aggression on the dominions of your Highness, in that event the British Government would be prepared to aid you, to such extent and in such manner as may appear to the British Government necessary in repelling it; provided that your Highness follows unreservedly the advice of the British Government in regard to your external relations.

¹ *Note.*—This letter, which is generally referred to as the letter from the Foreign Secretary dated 20 July 1880, is known to have been sealed by Mr. Griffin and delivered by him on 31 July 1880.

Appendix IV¹

GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE PRINCIPAL MEMBERS OF THE MUHAMMADZAI OR BARUKZAI FAMILY

Sardar PAINDA KHAN



¹ See Pt. II, Ch. XII (1).

Appendix V

BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE student of Central Asian History is liable to find himself overwhelmed by a mass of material covering certain phases of his study, and in other places confronted with an almost blank sheet. Detailed bibliographies are to be found in the *Cambridge History of India*, in Davies's *North-West Frontier*, and in Sykes's *History of Afghanistan*. I propose in the following paragraphs not to attempt an exhaustive list but merely to note certain works which I have found useful and which if consulted will lead on to others.

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